

RANDOM PD LITERATURE



Mouth of the Seine, by Claude Monet

Poetry, humor, adventure, romance, science fiction, by Guy de Maupassant, Edith Wharton, The Brothers Grimm – something for everyone in the family here. Compilation by Matt Pierard, Creative Commons non-commercial copyright 2017.

TWO LITTLE SOLDIERS

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Maupassant Original Short Stories, Complete*

Every Sunday, as soon as they were free, the little soldiers would go for a walk. They turned to the right on leaving the barracks, crossed Courbevoie with rapid strides, as though on a forced march; then, as the houses grew scarcer, they slowed down and followed the dusty road which leads to Bezons.

They were small and thin, lost in their ill-fitting capes, too large and too long, whose sleeves covered their hands; their ample red trousers fell in folds around their ankles. Under the high, stiff shako one could

just barely perceive two thin, hollow-cheeked Breton faces, with their calm, naive blue eyes. They never spoke during their journey, going straight before them, the same idea in each one's mind taking the place of conversation. For at the entrance of the little forest of Champioux they had found a spot which reminded them of home, and they did not feel happy anywhere else.

At the crossing of the Colombes and Chatou roads, when they arrived under the trees, they would take off their heavy, oppressive headgear and wipe their foreheads.

They always stopped for a while on the bridge at Bezons, and looked at the Seine. They stood there several minutes, bending over the railing, watching the white sails, which perhaps reminded them of their home, and of the fishing smacks leaving for the open.

As soon as they had crossed the Seine, they would purchase provisions at the delicatessen, the baker's, and the wine merchant's. A piece of bologna, four cents' worth of bread, and a quart of wine, made up the luncheon which they carried away, wrapped up in their handkerchiefs. But as soon as they were out of the village their gait would slacken and they would begin to talk.

Before them was a plain with a few clumps of trees, which led to the woods, a little forest which seemed to remind them of that other forest at Kermarivan. The wheat and oat fields bordered on the narrow path, and Jean Kerderen said each time to Luc Le Ganidec:

"It's just like home, just like Plounivon."

"Yes, it's just like home."

And they went on, side by side, their minds full of dim memories of home. They saw the fields, the hedges, the forests, and beaches.

Each time they stopped near a large stone on the edge of the private estate, because it reminded them of the dolmen of Locneuen.

As soon as they reached the first clump of trees, Luc Le Ganidec would cut off a small stick, and, whittling it slowly, would walk on, thinking of the folks at home.

Jean Kerderen carried the provisions.

From time to time Luc would mention a name, or allude to some boyish prank which would give them food for plenty of thought. And the home country, so dear and so distant, would little by little gain possession of their minds, sending them back through space, to the well-known forms and noises, to the familiar scenery, with the fragrance of its green fields and sea air. They no longer noticed the smells of the city. And in

their dreams they saw their friends leaving, perhaps forever, for the dangerous fishing grounds.

They were walking slowly, Luc Le Ganidec and Jean Kerderen, contented and sad, haunted by a sweet sorrow, the slow and penetrating sorrow of a captive animal which remembers the days of its freedom.

And when Luc had finished whittling his stick, they came to a little nook, where every Sunday they took their meal. They found the two bricks, which they had hidden in a hedge, and they made a little fire of dry branches and roasted their sausages on the ends of their knives.

When their last crumb of bread had been eaten and the last drop of wine had been drunk, they stretched themselves out on the grass side by side, without speaking, their half-closed eyes looking away in the distance, their hands clasped as in prayer, their red-trousered legs mingling with the bright colors of the wild flowers.

Towards noon they glanced, from time to time, towards the village of Bezons, for the dairy maid would soon be coming. Every Sunday she would pass in front of them on the way to milk her cow, the only cow in the neighborhood which was sent out to pasture.

Soon they would see the girl, coming through the fields, and it pleased them to watch the sparkling sunbeams reflected from her shining pail. They never spoke of her. They were just glad to see her, without understanding why.

She was a tall, strapping girl, freckled and tanned by the open air--a girl typical of the Parisian suburbs.

Once, on noticing that they were always sitting in the same place, she said to them:

"Do you always come here?"

Luc Le Ganidec, more daring than his friend, stammered:

"Yes, we come here for our rest."

That was all. But the following Sunday, on seeing them, she smiled with the kindly smile of a woman who understood their shyness, and she asked:

"What are you doing here? Are you watching the grass grow?"

Luc, cheered up, smiled: "P'raps."

She continued: "It's not growing fast, is it?"

He answered, still laughing: "Not exactly."

She went on. But when she came back with her pail full of milk, she stopped before them and said:

"Want some? It will remind you of home."

She had, perhaps instinctively, guessed and touched the right spot.

Both were moved. Then not without difficulty, she poured some milk into the bottle in which they had brought their wine. Luc started to drink, carefully watching lest he should take more than his share. Then he passed the bottle to Jean. She stood before them, her hands on her hips, her pail at her feet, enjoying the pleasure that she was giving them. Then she went on, saying: "Well, bye-bye until next Sunday!"

For a long time they watched her tall form as it receded in the distance, blending with the background, and finally disappeared.

The following week as they left the barracks, Jean said to Luc:

"Don't you think we ought to buy her something good?"

They were sorely perplexed by the problem of choosing something to bring to the dairy maid. Luc was in favor of bringing her some chitterlings; but Jean, who had a sweet tooth, thought that candy would be the best thing. He won, and so they went to a grocery to buy two sous' worth, of red and white candies.

This time they ate more quickly than usual, excited by anticipation.

Jean was the first one to notice her. "There she is," he said; and Luc answered: "Yes, there she is."

She smiled when she saw them, and cried:

"Well, how are you to-day?"

They both answered together:

"All right! How's everything with you?"

Then she started to talk of simple things which might interest them; of the weather, of the crops, of her masters.

They didn't dare to offer their candies, which were slowly melting in Jean's pocket. Finally Luc, growing bolder, murmured:

"We have brought you something."

She asked: "Let's see it."

Then Jean, blushing to the tips of his ears, reached in his pocket, and drawing out the little paper bag, handed it to her.

She began to eat the little sweet dainties. The two soldiers sat in front of her, moved and delighted.

At last she went to do her milking, and when she came back she again gave them some milk.

They thought of her all through the week and often spoke of her: The following Sunday she sat beside them for a longer time.

The three of them sat there, side by side, their eyes looking far away in the distance, their hands clasped over their knees, and they told each other little incidents and little details of the villages where they were born, while the cow, waiting to be milked, stretched her heavy head toward the girl and moored.

Soon the girl consented to eat with them and to take a sip of wine. Often she brought them plums pocket for plums were now ripe. Her presence enlivened the little Breton soldiers, who chattered away like two birds.

One Tuesday something unusual happened to Luc Le Ganidec; he asked for leave and did not return until ten o'clock at night.

Jean, worried and racked his brain to account for his friend's having obtained leave.

The following Friday, Luc borrowed ten sons from one of his friends, and once more asked and obtained leave for several hours.

When he started out with Jean on Sunday he seemed queer, disturbed, changed. Kerderen did not understand; he vaguely suspected something, but he could not guess what it might be.

They went straight to the usual place, and lunched slowly. Neither was hungry.

Soon the girl appeared. They watched her approach as they always did. When she was near, Luc arose and went towards her. She placed her pail on the ground and kissed him. She kissed him passionately, throwing her arms around his neck, without paying attention to Jean, without even noticing that he was there.

Poor Jean was dazed, so dazed that he could not understand. His mind was upset and his heart broken, without his even realizing why.

Then the girl sat down beside Luc, and they started to chat.

Jean was not looking at them. He understood now why his friend had gone out twice during the week. He felt the pain and the sting which treachery and deceit leave in their wake.

Luc and the girl went together to attend to the cow.

Jean followed them with his eyes. He saw them disappear side by side, the red trousers of his friend making a scarlet spot against the white road. It was Luc who sank the stake to which the cow was tethered. The girl stooped down to milk the cow, while he absent-mindedly stroked the animal's glossy neck. Then they left the pail in the grass and disappeared in the woods.

Jean could no longer see anything but the wall of leaves through which they had passed. He was unmanned so that he did not have strength to stand. He stayed there, motionless, bewildered and grieving-simple, passionate grief. He wanted to weep, to run away, to hide somewhere, never to see anyone again.

Then he saw them coming back again. They were walking slowly, hand in hand, as village lovers do. Luc was carrying the pail.

After kissing him again, the girl went on, nodding carelessly to Jean. She did not offer him any milk that day.

The two little soldiers sat side by side, motionless as always, silent and quiet, their calm faces in no way betraying the trouble in their hearts. The sun shone down on them. From time to time they could hear the plaintive lowing of the cow. At the usual time they arose to return.

Luc was whittling a stick. Jean carried the empty bottle. He left it at the wine merchant's in Bezons. Then they stopped on the bridge, as they did every Sunday, and watched the water flowing by.

Jean leaned over the railing, farther and farther, as though he had seen something in the stream which hypnotized him. Luc said to him:

"What's the matter? Do you want a drink?"

He had hardly said the last word when Jean's head carried away the rest of his body, and the little blue and red soldier fell like a shot and disappeared in the water.

Luc, paralyzed with horror, tried vainly to shout for help. In the distance he saw something move; then his friend's head bobbed up out of the water only to disappear again.

Farther down he again noticed a hand, just one hand, which appeared and again went out of sight. That was all.

The boatmen who had rushed to the scene found the body that day.

Luc ran back to the barracks, crazed, and with eyes and voice full of tears, he related the accident: "He leaned--he--he was leaning --so far over--that his head carried him away--and--he--fell --he fell---"

Emotion choked him so that he could say no more. If he had only known.



OLD PIPES AND THE DRYAD

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *A Chosen Few*, by Frank R. Stockton

A mountain brook ran through a little village. Over the brook there was a narrow bridge, and from the bridge a foot-path led out from the village and up the hillside to the cottage of Old Pipes and his mother. For many, many years Old Pipes had been employed by the villagers to pipe the cattle down from the hills. Every afternoon, an hour before sunset, he would sit on a rock in front of his cottage and play on his pipes. Then all the flocks and herds that were grazing on the mountains would hear him, wherever they might happen to be, and would come down to the village--the cows by the easiest paths, the sheep by those not quite so easy, and the goats by the steep and rocky ways that were hardest of all.

But now, for a year or more, Old Pipes had not piped the cattle home. It is true that every afternoon he sat upon the rock and played upon his familiar instrument; but the cattle did not hear him. He had grown old and his breath was feeble. The echoes of his cheerful notes, which used to come from the rocky hill on the other side of the valley, were heard no more; and twenty yards from Old Pipes one could scarcely tell what tune he was playing. He had become somewhat deaf, and did not know that the sound of his pipes was so thin and weak, and that the cattle did not hear him. The cows, the sheep, and the goats came down every afternoon as before, but this was because two boys and a girl were sent up after them. The villagers did not wish the good old man to know that his piping was no longer of any use, so they paid him his little salary every month, and said nothing about the two boys and the girl.

Old Pipes's mother was, of course, a great deal older than he was,

and was as deaf as a gate--posts, latch, hinges, and all--and she never knew that the sound of her son's pipe did not spread over all the mountain-side and echo back strong and clear from the opposite hills. She was very fond of Old Pipes, and proud of his piping; and as he was so much younger than she was, she never thought of him as being very old. She cooked for him, and made his bed, and mended his clothes; and they lived very comfortably on his little salary.

One afternoon, at the end of the month, when Old Pipes had finished his piping, he took his stout staff and went down the hill to the village to receive the money for his month's work. The path seemed a great deal steeper and more difficult than it used to be; and Old Pipes thought that it must have been washed by the rains and greatly damaged. He remembered it as a path that was quite easy to traverse either up or down. But Old Pipes had been a very active man, and as his mother was so much older than he was, he never thought of himself as aged and infirm.

When the Chief Villager had paid him, and he had talked a little with some of his friends, Old Pipes started to go home. But when he had crossed the bridge over the brook and gone a short distance up the hillside, he became very tired and sat down upon a stone. He had not been sitting there half a minute when along came two boys and a girl.

"Children," said Old Pipes, "I'm very tired to-night, and I don't believe I can climb up this steep path to my home. I think I shall have to ask you to help me."

"We will do that," said the boys and the girl, quite cheerfully; and one boy took him by the right hand and the other by the left, while the girl pushed him in the back. In this way he went up the hill quite easily, and soon reached his cottage door. Old Pipes gave each of the three children a copper coin, and then they sat down for a few minutes' rest before starting back to the village.

"I'm sorry that I tired you so much," said Old Pipes.

"Oh, that would not have tired us," said one of the boys, "if we had not been so far to-day after the cows, the sheep, and the goats. They rambled high up on the mountain, and we never before had such a time in finding them."

"Had to go after the cows, the sheep, and the goats!" exclaimed Old Pipes. "What do you mean by that?"

The girl, who stood behind the old man, shook her head, put her hand on her mouth, and made all sorts of signs to the boy to stop talking on this subject; but he did not notice her and promptly answered Old Pipes.

"Why, you see, good sir," said he, "that as the cattle can't hear your pipes now, somebody has to go after them every evening to drive them down from the mountain, and the Chief Villager has hired us three to do it. Generally it is not very hard work, but to-night the cattle had wandered far."

"How long have you been doing this?" asked the old man.

The girl shook her head and clapped her hand on her mouth more vigorously than before, but the boy went on.

"I think it is about a year now," he said, "since the people first felt sure that the cattle could not hear your pipes; and from that time we've been driving them down. But we are rested now and will go home. Good-night, sir."

The three children then went down the hill, the girl scolding the boy all the way home. Old Pipes stood silent a few moments and then he went into his cottage.

"Mother," he shouted, "did you hear what those children said?"

"Children!" exclaimed the old woman; "I did not hear them. I did not know there were any children here."

Then Old Pipes told his mother--shouting very loudly to make her hear--how the two boys and the girl had helped him up the hill, and what he had heard about his piping and the cattle.

"They can't hear you?" cried his mother. "Why, what's the matter with the cattle?"

"Ah me!" said Old Pipes, "I don't believe there's anything the matter with the cattle. It must be with me and my pipes that there is something the matter. But one thing is certain: if I do not earn the wages the Chief Villager pays me, I shall not take them. I shall go straight down to the village and give back the money I received to-day."

"Nonsense!" cried his mother. "I'm sure you've piped as well as you could, and no more can be expected. And what are we to do without the money?"

"I don't know," said Old Pipes; "but I'm going down to the village to pay it back."

The sun had now set; but the moon was shining very brightly on the hillside, and Old Pipes could see his way very well. He did not take the same path by which he had gone before, but followed another,

which led among the trees upon the hillside, and, though longer, was not so steep.

When he had gone about half-way the old man sat down to rest, leaning his back against a great oak-tree. As he did so he heard a sound like knocking inside the tree, and then a voice distinctly said:

"Let me out! let me out!"

Old Pipes instantly forgot that he was tired, and sprang to his feet. "This must be a Dryad-tree!" he exclaimed. "If it is, I'll let her out."

Old Pipes had never, to his knowledge, seen a Dryad-tree, but he knew there were such trees on the hillsides and the mountains, and that Dryads lived in them. He knew, too, that in the summer-time, on those days when the moon rose before the sun went down, a Dryad could come out of her tree if any one could find the key which locked her in, and turn it. Old Pipes closely examined the trunk of the tree, which stood in the full moonlight. "If I see that key," he said, "I shall surely turn it." Before long he perceived a piece of bark standing out from the tree, which appeared to him very much like the handle of a key. He took hold of it, and found he could turn it quite around. As he did so a large part of the side of the tree was pushed open, and a beautiful Dryad stepped quickly out.

For a moment she stood motionless, gazing on the scene before her--the tranquil valley, the hills, the forest, and the mountain-side, all lying in the soft clear light of the moon. "Oh, lovely! lovely!" she exclaimed. "How long it is since I have seen anything like this!" And then, turning to Old Pipes, she said, "How good of you to let me out! I am so happy and so thankful that I must kiss you, you dear old man!" And she threw her arms around the neck of Old Pipes and kissed him on both cheeks. "You don't know," she then went on to say, "how doleful it is to be shut up so long in a tree. I don't mind it in the winter, for then I am glad to be sheltered; but in summer it is a rueful thing not to be able to see all the beauties of the world. And it's ever so long since I've been let out. People so seldom come this way; and when they do come at the right time they either don't hear me, or they are frightened and run away. But you, you dear old man, you were not frightened, and you looked and looked for the key, and you let me out, and now I shall not have to go back till winter has come and the air grows cold. Oh, it is glorious! What can I do for you to show you how grateful I am?"

"I am very glad," said Old Pipes, "that I let you out, since I see that it makes you so happy; but I must admit that I tried to find the key because I had a great desire to see a Dryad. But if you wish

to do something for me, you can, if you happen to be going down toward the village."

"To the village!" exclaimed the Dryad. "I will go anywhere for you, my kind old benefactor."

"Well, then," said Old Pipes, "I wish you would take this little bag of money to the Chief Villager and tell him that Old Pipes cannot receive pay for the services which he does not perform. It is now more than a year that I have not been able to make the cattle hear me when I piped to call them home. I did not know this until to-night; but now that I know it I cannot keep the money, and so I send it back." And, handing the little bag to the Dryad, he bade her good-night and turned toward his cottage.

"Good-night," said the Dryad. "And I thank you over and over and over again, you good old man!"

Old Pipes walked toward his home, very glad to be saved the fatigue of going all the way down to the village and back again. "To be sure," he said to himself, "this path does not seem at all steep, and I can walk along it very easily; but it would have tired me dreadfully to come up all the way from the village, especially as I could not have expected those children to help me again." When he reached home his mother was surprised to see him returning so soon.

"What!" she exclaimed, "have you already come back? What did the Chief Villager say? Did he take the money?"

Old Pipes was just about to tell her that he had sent the money to the village by a Dryad when he suddenly reflected that his mother would be sure to disapprove such a proceeding, and so he merely said he had sent it by a person whom he had met.

"And how do you know that the person will ever take it to the Chief Villager?" cried his mother. "You will lose it, and the villagers will never get it. Oh, Pipes! Pipes! when will you be old enough to have ordinary common sense?"

Old Pipes considered that as he was already seventy years of age he could scarcely expect to grow any wiser, but he made no remark on this subject; and, saying that he doubted not that the money would go safely to its destination, he sat down to his supper. His mother scolded him roundly, but he did not mind it; and after supper he went out and sat on a rustic chair in front of the cottage to look at the moon-lit village, and to wonder whether or not the Chief Villager really received the money. While he was doing these two things he went fast asleep.

When Old Pipes left the Dryad, she did not go down to the village

with the little bag of money. She held it in her hand and thought about what she had heard. "This is a good and honest old man," she said, "and it is a shame that he should lose this money. He looked as if he needed it, and I don't believe the people in the village will take it from one who has served them so long. Often, when in my tree, have I heard the sweet notes of his pipes. I am going to take the money back to him." She did not start immediately, because there were so many beautiful things to look at; but after a while she went up to the cottage, and, finding Old Pipes asleep in his chair, she slipped the little bag into his coat pocket and silently sped away.

The next day Old Pipes told his mother that he would go up the mountain and cut some wood. He had a right to get wood from the mountain, but for a long time he had been content to pick up the dead branches which lay about his cottage. To-day, however, he felt so strong and vigorous that he thought he would go and cut some fuel that would be better than this. He worked all the morning, and when he came back he did not feel at all tired, and he had a very good appetite for his dinner.

Now, Old Pipes knew a good deal about Dryads, but there was one thing which, although he had heard, he had forgotten. This was that a kiss from a Dryad made a person ten years younger. The people of the village knew this, and they were very careful not to let any child of ten years or younger go into the woods where the Dryads were supposed to be; for if they should chance to be kissed by one of these tree-nymphs, they would be set back so far that they would cease to exist. A story was told in the village that a very bad boy of eleven once ran away into the woods and had an adventure of this kind; and when his mother found him he was a little baby of one year old. Taking advantage of her opportunity, she brought him up more carefully than she had done before; and he grew to be a very good boy indeed.

Now, Old Pipes had been kissed twice by the Dryad, once on each cheek, and he therefore felt as vigorous and active as when he was a hale man of fifty. His mother noticed how much work he was doing, and told him that he need not try in that way to make up for the loss of his piping wages; for he would only tire himself out and get sick. But her son answered that he had not felt so well for years, and that he was quite able to work. In the course of the afternoon, Old Pipes, for the first time that day, put his hand in his coat pocket, and there, to his amazement, he found the little bag of money. "Well, well!" he exclaimed, "I am stupid indeed! I really thought that I had seen a Dryad; but when I sat down by that big oak-tree I must have gone to sleep and dreamed it all; and then I came home thinking I had given the money to a Dryad, when it was in my pocket all the time. But the Chief Villager shall have the money. I shall not take it to him to-day; but to-morrow I wish to go to the village to see some of my old friends, and then I shall give up the

money."

Toward the close of the afternoon, Old Pipes, as had been his custom for so many years, took his pipes from the shelf on which they lay, and went out to the rock in front of the cottage.

"What are you going to do?" cried his mother. "If you will not consent to be paid, why do you pipe?"

"I am going to pipe for my own pleasure," said her son. "I am used to it, and I do not wish to give it up. It does not matter now whether the cattle hear me or not, and I am sure that my piping will injure no one."

When the good man began to play upon his favorite instrument he was astonished at the sound that came from it. The beautiful notes of the pipes sounded clear and strong down into the valley, and spread over the hills and up the sides of the mountain beyond, while, after a little interval, an echo came back from the rocky hill on the other side of the valley.

"Ha! ha!" he cried, "what has happened to my pipes? They must have been stopped up of late, but now they are as clear and good as ever."

Again the merry notes went sounding far and wide. The cattle on the mountain heard them, and those that were old enough remembered how these notes had called them from their pastures every evening, and so they started down the mountain-side, the others following.

The merry notes were heard in the village below, and the people were much astonished thereby. "Why, who can be blowing the pipes of Old Pipes?" they said. But, as they were all very busy, no one went up to see. One thing, however, was plain enough: the cattle were coming down the mountain. And so the two boys and the girl did not have to go after them, and had an hour for play, for which they were very glad.

The next morning Old Pipes started down to the village with his money, and on the way he met the Dryad. "Oh, ho!" he cried, "is that you? Why, I thought my letting you out of the tree was nothing but a dream."

"A dream!" cried the Dryad; "if you only knew how happy you have made me you would not think it merely a dream. And has it not benefited you? Do you not feel happier? Yesterday I heard you playing beautifully on your pipes."

"Yes, yes," cried he. "I did not understand it before, but I see it all now. I have really grown younger. I thank you, I thank you, good

Dryad, from the bottom of my heart. It was the finding of the money in my pocket that made me think it was a dream."

"Oh, I put it in when you were asleep," she said, laughing, "because I thought you ought to keep it. Good-by, kind, honest man. May you live long and be as happy as I am now."

Old Pipes was greatly delighted when he understood that he was really a younger man; but that made no difference about the money, and he kept on his way to the village. As soon as he reached it he was eagerly questioned as to who had been playing his pipes the evening before; and when the people heard that it was himself, they were very much surprised. Thereupon Old Pipes told what had happened to him, and then there was greater wonder, with hearty congratulations and hand-shakes; for Old Pipes was liked by every one. The Chief Villager refused to take his money, and, although Old Pipes said that he had not earned it, every one present insisted that, as he would now play on his pipes as before, he should lose nothing because, for a time, he was unable to perform his duty.

So Old Pipes was obliged to keep his money, and after an hour or two spent in conversation with his friends, he returned to his cottage.

There was one individual, however, who was not at all pleased with what had happened to Old Pipes. This was an Echo-dwarf, who lived on the hills on the other side of the valley, and whose duty it was to echo back the notes of the pipes whenever they could be heard. There were a great many other Echo-dwarfs on these hills, some of whom echoed back the songs of maidens, some the shouts of children, and others the music that was often heard in the village. But there was only one who could send back the strong notes of the pipes of Old Pipes, and this had been his sole duty for many years. But when the old man grew feeble, and the notes of his pipes could not be heard on the opposite hills, this Echo-dwarf had nothing to do, and he spent his time in delightful idleness; and he slept so much and grew so fat that it made his companions laugh to see him walk.

On the afternoon on which, after so long an interval, the sound of the pipes was heard on the echo-hills, this dwarf was fast asleep behind a rock. As soon as the first notes reached them, some of his companions ran to wake him. Rolling to his feet, he echoed back the merry tune of Old Pipes. Naturally he was very much annoyed and indignant at being thus obliged to give up his life of comfortable leisure, and he hoped very much that this pipe-playing would not occur again. The next afternoon he was awake and listening, and, sure enough, at the usual hour, along came the notes of the pipes as clear and strong as they ever had been; and he was obliged to work as long as Old Pipes played. The Echo-dwarf was very angry. He had supposed, of course, that the pipe-playing had ceased forever, and he felt that he had a right to be indignant at being thus deceived.

He was so much disturbed that he made up his mind to go and try to find out whether this was to be a temporary matter or not. He had plenty of time, as the pipes were played but once a day, and he set off early in the morning for the hill on which Old Pipes lived. It was hard work for the fat little fellow, and when he had crossed the valley and had gone some distance into the woods on the hillside, he stopped to rest, and in a few minutes the Dryad came tripping along.

"Ho, ho!" exclaimed the dwarf; "what are you doing here? and how did you get out of your tree?"

"Doing!" cried the Dryad, "I am being happy; that's what I am doing. And I was let out of my tree by a good old man who plays the pipes to call the cattle down from the mountain. And it makes me happier to think that I have been of service to him. I gave him two kisses of gratitude, and now he is young enough to play his pipes as well as ever."

The Echo-dwarf stepped forward, his face pale with passion. "Am I to believe," he said, "that you are the cause of this great evil that has come upon me? and that you are the wicked creature who has again started this old man upon his career of pipe-playing? What have I ever done to you that you should have condemned me for years and years to echo back the notes of those wretched pipes?"

At this the Dryad laughed loudly.

"What a funny little fellow you are!" she said. "Any one would think you had been condemned to toil from morning till night; while what you really have to do is merely to imitate for half an hour every day the merry notes of Old Pipes's piping. Fie upon you, Echo-dwarf! You are lazy and selfish; and that is what is the matter with you. Instead of grumbling at being obliged to do a little wholesome work--which is less, I am sure, than that of any other Echo-dwarf upon the rocky hillside--you should rejoice at the good fortune of the old man who has regained so much of his strength and vigor. Go home and learn to be just and generous; and then, perhaps, you may be happy. Good-by."

"Insolent creature!" shouted the dwarf, as he shook his fat little fist at her. "I'll make you suffer for this. You shall find out what it is to heap injury and insult upon one like me, and to snatch from him the repose that he has earned by long years of toil." And, shaking his head savagely, he hurried back to the rocky hillside.

Every afternoon the merry notes of the pipes of Old Pipes sounded down into the valley and over the hills and up the mountain-side; and every afternoon when he had echoed them back, the little dwarf grew more and more angry with the Dryad. Each day, from early morning till it was time for him to go back to his duties upon the

rocky hillside, he searched the woods for her. He intended, if he met her, to pretend to be very sorry for what he had said, and he thought he might be able to play a trick upon her which would avenge him well. One day, while thus wandering among the trees, he met Old Pipes. The Echo-dwarf did not generally care to see or speak to ordinary people; but now he was so anxious to find the object of his search that he stopped and asked Old Pipes if he had seen the Dryad. The piper had not noticed the little fellow, and he looked down on him with some surprise.

"No," he said, "I have not seen her, and I have been looking everywhere for her."

"You!" cried the dwarf; "what do you wish with her?"

Old Pipes then sat down on a stone, so that he should be nearer the ear of his small companion, and he told what the Dryad had done for him.

When the Echo-dwarf heard that this was the man whose pipes he was obliged to echo back every day, he would have slain him on the spot had he been able; but, as he was not able, he merely ground his teeth and listened to the rest of the story.

"I am looking for the Dryad now," Old Pipes continued, "on account of my aged mother. When I was old myself, I did not notice how very old my mother was; but now it shocks me to see how feeble and decrepit her years have caused her to become; and I am looking for the Dryad to ask her to make my mother younger, as she made me."

The eyes of the Echo-dwarf glistened. Here was a man who might help him in his plans.

"Your idea is a good one," he said to Old Pipes, "and it does you honor. But you should know that a Dryad can make no person younger but one who lets her out of her tree. However, you can manage the affair very easily. All you need do is to find the Dryad, tell her what you want, and request her to step into her tree and be shut up for a short time. Then you will go and bring your mother to the tree; she will open it, and everything will be as you wish. Is not this a good plan?"

"Excellent!" cried Old Pipes; "and I will go instantly and search more diligently for the Dryad."

"Take me with you," said the Echo-dwarf. "You can easily carry me on your strong shoulders; and I shall be glad to help you in any way that I can."

"Now, then," said the little fellow to himself, as Old Pipes carried

him rapidly along, "if he persuades the Dryad to get into a tree--and she is quite foolish enough to do it--and then goes away to bring his mother, I shall take a stone or a club and I will break off the key of that tree, so that nobody can ever turn it again. Then Mistress Dryad will see what she has brought upon herself by her behavior to me."

Before long they came to the great oak-tree in which the Dryad had lived, and, at a distance, they saw that beautiful creature herself coming toward them.

"How excellently well everything happens!" said the dwarf. "Put me down, and I will go. Your business with the Dryad is more important than mine; and you need not say anything about my having suggested your plan to you. I am willing that you should have all the credit of it yourself."

Old Pipes put the Echo-dwarf upon the ground, but the little rogue did not go away. He concealed himself between some low, mossy rocks, and he was so much of their color that you would not have noticed him if you had been looking straight at him.

When the Dryad came up, Old Pipes lost no time in telling her about his mother, and what he wished her to do. At first the Dryad answered nothing, but stood looking very sadly at Old Pipes.

"Do you really wish me to go into my tree again?" she said. "I should dreadfully dislike to do it, for I don't know what might happen. It is not at all necessary, for I could make your mother younger at any time if she would give me the opportunity. I had already thought of making you still happier in this way, and several times I have waited about your cottage, hoping to meet your aged mother; but she never comes outside, and you know a Dryad cannot enter a house. I cannot imagine what put this idea into your head. Did you think of it yourself?"

"No, I cannot say that I did," answered Old Pipes. "A little dwarf whom I met in the woods proposed it to me."

"Oh!" cried the Dryad, "now I see through it all. It is the scheme of that vile Echo-dwarf--your enemy and mine. Where is he? I should like to see him."

"I think he has gone away," said Old Pipes.

"No, he has not," said the Dryad, whose quick eyes perceived the Echo-dwarf among the rocks. "There he is. Seize him and drag him out, I beg of you."

Old Pipes perceived the dwarf as soon as he was pointed out to him,

and, running to the rocks, he caught the little fellow by the arm and pulled him out.

"Now, then," cried the Dryad, who had opened the door of the great oak, "just stick him in there and we will shut him up. Then I shall be safe from his mischief for the rest of the time I am free."

Old Pipes thrust the Echo-dwarf into the tree; the Dryad pushed the door shut; there was a clicking sound of bark and wood, and no one would have noticed that the big oak had ever had an opening in it.

"There!" said the Dryad; "now we need not be afraid of him. And I assure you, my good piper, that I shall be very glad to make your mother younger as soon as I can. Will you not ask her to come out and meet me?"

"Of course I will," cried Old Pipes; "and I will do it without delay."

And then, the Dryad by his side, he hurried to his cottage. But when he mentioned the matter to his mother, the old woman became very angry indeed. She did not believe in Dryads; and, if they really did exist, she knew they must be witches and sorceresses, and she would have nothing to do with them. If her son had ever allowed himself to be kissed by one of them, he ought to be ashamed of himself. As to its doing him the least bit of good, she did not believe a word of it. He felt better than he used to feel, but that was very common; she had sometimes felt that way herself. And she forbade him ever to mention a Dryad to her again.

That afternoon Old Pipes, feeling very sad that his plan in regard to his mother had failed, sat down upon the rock and played upon his pipes. The pleasant sounds went down the valley and up the hills and mountain, but, to the great surprise of some persons who happened to notice the fact, the notes were not echoed back from the rocky hillside, but from the woods on the side of the valley on which Old Pipes lived. The next day many of the villagers stopped in their work to listen to the echo of the pipes coming from the woods. The sound was not as clear and strong as it used to be when it was sent back from the rocky hillside, but it certainly came from among the trees. Such a thing as an echo changing its place in this way had never been heard of before, and nobody was able to explain how it could have happened. Old Pipes, however, knew very well that the sound came from the Echo-dwarf shut up in the great oak-tree. The sides of the tree were thin, and the sound of the pipes could be heard through them, and the dwarf was obliged by the laws of his being to echo back those notes whenever they came to him. But Old Pipes thought he might get the Dryad in trouble if he let any one know that the Echo-dwarf was shut up in the tree, and so he wisely said nothing about it.

One day the two boys and the girl who had helped Old Pipes up the hill were playing in the woods. Stopping near the great oak-tree, they heard a sound of knocking within it, and then a voice plainly said:

"Let me out! let me out!"

For a moment the children stood still in astonishment, and then one of the boys exclaimed:

"Oh, it is a Dryad, like the one Old Pipes found! Let's let her out!"

"What are you thinking of?" cried the girl. "I am the oldest of all, and I am only thirteen. Do you wish to be turned into crawling babies? Run! run! run!"

And the two boys and the girl dashed down into the valley as fast as their legs could carry them. There was no desire in their youthful hearts to be made younger than they were. And for fear that their parents might think it well that they should commence their careers anew, they never said a word about finding the Dryad-tree.

As the summer days went on Old Pipes's mother grew feebler and feebler. One day when her son was away--for he now frequently went into the woods to hunt or fish, or down into the valley to work--she arose from her knitting to prepare the simple dinner. But she felt so weak and tired that she was not able to do the work to which she had been so long accustomed. "Alas! alas!" she said, "the time has come when I am too old to work. My son will have to hire some one to come here and cook his meals, make his bed, and mend his clothes. Alas! alas! I had hoped that as long as I lived I should be able to do these things. But it is not so. I have grown utterly worthless, and some one else must prepare the dinner for my son. I wonder where he is." And tottering to the door, she went outside to look for him. She did not feel able to stand, and reaching the rustic chair, she sank into it, quite exhausted, and soon fell asleep.

The Dryad, who had often come to the cottage to see if she could find an opportunity of carrying out Old Pipes's affectionate design, now happened by; and seeing that the much-desired occasion had come, she stepped up quietly behind the old woman and gently kissed her on each cheek, and then as quietly disappeared.

In a few minutes the mother of Old Pipes awoke, and looking up at the sun, she exclaimed, "Why, it is almost dinner-time! My son will be here directly, and I am not ready for him." And rising to her feet, she hurried into the house, made the fire, set the meat and vegetables to cook, laid the cloth, and by the time her son arrived

the meal was on the table.

"How a little sleep does refresh one!" she said to herself, as she was bustling about. She was a woman of very vigorous constitution, and at seventy had been a great deal stronger and more active than her son was at that age. The moment Old Pipes saw his mother, he knew that the Dryad had been there; but, while he felt as happy as a king, he was too wise to say anything about her.

"It is astonishing how well I feel to-day," said his mother; "and either my hearing has improved or you speak much more plainly than you have done of late."

The summer days went on and passed away, the leaves were falling from the trees, and the air was becoming cold.

"Nature has ceased to be lovely," said the Dryad, "and the night winds chill me. It is time for me to go back into my comfortable quarters in the great oak. But first I must pay another visit to the cottage of Old Pipes."

She found the piper and his mother sitting side by side on the rock in front of the door. The cattle were not to go to the mountain any more that season, and he was piping them down for the last time. Loud and merrily sounded the pipes of Old Pipes, and down the mountain-side came the cattle, the cows by the easiest paths, the sheep by those not quite so easy, and the goats by the most difficult ones among the rocks; while from the great oak-tree were heard the echoes of the cheerful music.

"How happy they look, sitting there together!" said the Dryad; "and I don't believe it will do them a bit of harm to be still younger." And moving quietly up behind them, she first kissed Old Pipes on his cheek and then his mother.

Old Pipes, who had stopped playing, knew what it was, but he did not move, and said nothing. His mother, thinking that her son had kissed her, turned to him with a smile and kissed him in return. And then she arose and went into the cottage, a vigorous woman of sixty, followed by her son, erect and happy, and twenty years younger than herself.

The Dryad sped away to the woods, shrugging her shoulders as she felt the cool evening wind.

When she reached the great oak, she turned the key and opened the door. "Come out," she said to the Echo-dwarf, who sat blinking within. "Winter is coming on, and I want the comfortable shelter of my tree for myself. The cattle have come down from the mountain for the last time this year, the pipes will no longer sound, and you can

go to your rocks and have a holiday until next spring."

Upon hearing these words the dwarf skipped quickly out, and the Dryad entered the tree and pulled the door shut after her. "Now, then," she said to herself, "he can break off the key if he likes. It does not matter to me. Another will grow out next spring. And although the good piper made me no promise, I know that when the warm days arrive next year he will come and let me out again."

The Echo-dwarf did not stop to break the key of the tree. He was too happy to be released to think of anything else, and he hastened as fast as he could to his home on the rocky hillside.

* * * * *

The Dryad was not mistaken when she trusted in the piper. When the warm days came again he went to the oak-tree to let her out. But, to his sorrow and surprise, he found the great tree lying upon the ground. A winter storm had blown it down, and it lay with its trunk shattered and split. And what became of the Dryad no one ever knew.



LOVE'S CAUTION By William H. Davies,
The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Georgian Poetry 1920-22*, by Various

Tell them, when you are home again,
How warm the air was now;
How silent were the birds and leaves,
And of the moon's full glow;
And how we saw afar
A falling star:
It was a tear of pure delight
Ran down the face of Heaven this happy night.

Our kisses are but love in flower,
Until that greater time
When, gathering strength, those flowers take wing,
And Love can reach his prime.
And now, my heart's delight,
Good night, good night;
Give me the last sweet kiss--
But do not breathe at home one word of this!



THE TRANSTEVERINA

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Artists' Wives*, by Alphonse Daudet

The play was just over, and while the crowd, with its many varied impressions, hurried away and poured out under the glare of the principal portico of the theatre, a few friends, of whom I was one, awaited the poet at the artists' entrance in order to congratulate him. His production had not, indeed, been very successful. Too powerful to suit the timid and trivial imagination of the public of our day, it was quite beyond the range of the stage, limited as that is by conventionalities and tolerated traditions. Pedantic criticism declared: "It is not fit for the stage!" and the scoffers of the boulevards revenged themselves for the emotion these magnificent verses had given them by repeating: "It won't pay!" As for us, we were proud of the friend who had dared to roll forth in a ringing peal, his splendid golden rhymes, flashing the best product of his genius beneath the artificial and murderous light of the lustres, and presenting his personages in life-like size, heedless of the optical illusion of the modern stage, of the dimness of opera-glass and defective vision.

Amid a motley crowd of scene shifters, firemen, and figurants muffled up in comforters, the poet approached us, his tall figure bent double, his coat collar chillily turned up over his thin beard and long grizzled hair. He seemed depressed. The scant applause of the hired claue and literary friends confined to a corner of the house foretold a limited number of representations, choice and rare spectators, and posters rapidly replaced without giving his name a chance of being known. When one has worked twenty of talent and life, this obstinate refusal of the public to comprehend is wearying and disheartening, and one ends by thinking: "Perhaps after all they are right." Fear paralyses and words fail. Our acclamations and enthusiastic greetings somewhat cheered him. "Really do you think so? Is it well done? 'Tis true I have given all I knew." And his feverish hands anxiously clutched ours, his eyes full of tears sought a sincere and reassuring glance. It was the imploring anguish of the sick person, asking the doctor: "It is not true, I'm not going to die?" No! poet, you will not die. The operettas and fairy pieces that have had hundreds of representations and thousands of spectators will be long since forgotten, scattered to the winds with their last playbills, while your work will ever remain fresh and living.

As we stood on the now deserted pavement, exhorting and cheering him, a loud contralto voice vulgarised by an Italian accent burst upon us.

"Hullo, artist! enough _pouégie_. Let's go and eat the _estoufato!_"

At the same moment a stout woman wrapped up in a hooded cape and a red tartan shawl linked her arm in that of our friend, in a manner so brutal and despotic that his countenance and attitude became at once embarrassed.

"My wife," he said, then turning towards her with a hesitating smile:

"Suppose we take them home and show them how you make an _estoufato?_"

Flattered in the conceit of her culinary accomplishments, the Italian graciously consented to receive us, and five or six of us started off for the heights of Montmartre where they dwelt, to share their stewed beef.

I confess I took a certain interest in the artist's home life. Since his marriage our friend had led a very secluded existence, almost always in the country; but what I knew of his life whetted my curiosity. Fifteen years before, when in all the freshness of a romantic imagination, he had met in the suburbs of Rome a magnificent creature with whom he immediately fell desperately in love. Maria Assunta, her father, and a brood of brothers and sisters inhabited one of those little houses of the Transtevera with walls uprising from the waters of the Tiber, and an old fishing boat rocking level with the door. One day he caught sight of the handsome Italian girl, with bare feet in the sand, red skirt tightly pleated around her, and unbleached linen sleeves tucked up to the shoulders, catching eels out of a large gleaming wet net. The silvery scales glistening through the meshes full of water, the golden river and scarlet petticoat, the beautiful black eyes deep and pensive, which seemed darkened in their musing by the surrounding sunlight struck the artist, perhaps even rather trivially, like some coloured print on the titlepage of a song in a music-seller's window.

It so chanced that the girl was heart-whole, having till now bestowed her affections on a big tom-cat, yellow and sly, also a great fisher of eels, who bristled up all over when anyone approached his mistress.

Beasts and men, our lover managed to tame all these folk, was married at Santa-Maria of the Transtevera and brought back to France the beautiful Assunta and her _cato_.

Ah! poor fellow, he ought also to have brought away at the same time some of the sunlight of that country, a scrap of the blue sky, the eccentric costume and the bulrushes of the Tiber, and the large swing nets of the _Ponte Rotto_; in fact the frame with the picture. Then he would have been spared the cruel disenchantment he experienced when, having settled in a modest flat on the fourth storey, on the heights of Montmartre, he saw his handsome Transteverina decked out in a crinoline,

a flounced dress, and a Parisian bonnet, which, constantly out of balance on the top of her heavy braids, assumed the most independent attitudes. Under the clear cold light of Parisian skies, the unfortunate man soon perceived that his wife was a fool, an irretrievable fool. Not a single idea even lurked in the velvety depths of those beautiful black eyes, lost in infinite contemplation. They glittered like an animal's in the calm of digestion, or in a chance gleam of light, nothing more. Withal the lady was common, vulgar, accustomed to govern by a slap all the little world of her native hut, and the least opposition threw her into uncontrollable rages.

Who would have guessed that the fine mouth, straitened by silence into the purest shape of an antique face, would suddenly open to let flow torrents of vulgar abuse? Without respect for herself or for him, out loud, in the street, at the theatre, she would pick a quarrel with him, and indulge in scenes of fearful jealousy. To crown all, devoid of any artistic feeling, she was completely ignorant of her husband's profession and language, of manners, in fact of everything. The little French she could be taught, only made her forget Italian, and the result was that she composed a kind of half and half jargon which had the most comical effect. In short this love story, begun like one of Lamartine's poems, was ending like a novel of Champfleury's. After having for a long time struggled to civilise this wild woman, the poet saw he must abandon the task. Too honourable to leave her, probably still too much in love, he made up his mind to shut himself up, see no one, and work hard. The few intimate friends he admitted to his house, saw that they embarrassed him and ceased to come.

Hence it was that for the last fifteen years he had been living boxed up in his household like in a leper's cell.

As I pondered over this wretched existence, I watched the strange couple walking before me. He, slender, tall and round-shouldered.

She, squarely built, heavy, shaking her shawl by an impatient shrug of her shoulders, with a free gait like a man's. She was tolerably cheerful, her speech was loud, and from time to time she turned round to see if we followed, familiarly shouting and calling by name those of us she happened to know, accentuating her words by much gesticulation as she would have hailed a fishing boat on the Tiber. When we reached their house, the _concierge_, furious at seeing so noisy a crew at such an unearthly hour, tried to prevent our entry. The Italian and he had a fearful row on the staircase. We were all dotted about on the winding stairs dimly lighted by the dying gas, ill at ease, uncomfortable, hardly knowing if we ought not to come down again.

"Come, quick, let us go up," said the poet in a low tone, and we followed him silently, while, leaning over the banisters that shook under her weight and anger, the Italian let fly a volley of abuse in which Roman imprecations alternated with the vocabulary of the

back slums. What a return home for the poet who had just roused the admiration of artistic Paris, and still retained in his fevered eyes the dazzling intoxication of his first performance! What a humiliating recall to every-day life!

It was only by the fireside in his little sitting room that the icy chill caused by this silly adventure was dispelled, and we should soon have completely forgotten it, had it not been for the piercing voice and bursts of laughter of the signora whom we heard in the kitchen telling her maid how soundly she had rated that _choulato!_ When the table was laid and supper ready, she came and seated herself amongst us, having taken off her shawl, bonnet and veil, and I was able to examine her at my leisure. She was no longer handsome. The square face, the broad heavy jaw, the coarse hair turning grey, and above all the vulgar expression of the mouth, contrasted singularly with the eternal and meaningless reverie of the dreamy gaze. Resting her elbows on the table, familiar and shapeless, she joined in the conversation without for an instant losing sight of her plate. Just over her head, proud amid all the melancholy rubbish of the drawing-room, a large portrait signed by an illustrious name, stood out of the surrounding shade,--it was Maria Assunta at twenty. The purple costume, the milky white of the pleated wimple, the bright gold of the over-abundant imitation jewelry, set off magnificently the brilliancy of a sunny complexion, the velvety shades of the thick hair growing low on the forehead, which seemed to be united by an almost imperceptible down to the superb and straight line of the eyebrows. How could such an exuberance of life and beauty have deteriorated and become such a mass of vulgarity? And curiously while the Transteverina talked, I interrogated her lovely eyes, so deep and soft on the canvas.

The excitement of the meal had put her in a good humour. To cheer up the poet, to whom his mingled failure and glory were doubly painful, she thumped him on the back, laughed with her mouth full, saying in her hideous jargon, that it was not worth while for such a trifle to fling oneself head downwards from the _campanile del Duomo_.

"Isn't it true, _il cato?_" she added turning to the old tom-cat crippled by rheumatism, snoring in front of the fire. Then suddenly, in the middle of an interesting discussion, she screamed out to her husband in a voice senseless and brutal as the crack of a rifle:

"Hey! artist! _la lampo qui filo!_"

The poor fellow immediately interrupted his conversation to wind up the lamp, humble, submissive, anxious to avoid the scene he dreaded, and which in spite of all, he did not escape.

On returning from the theatre we had stopped at the _Maison d'Or_ to get a bottle of choice wine to wash down the _estoufato_. All along the road Maria Assunta had piously carried it under her shawl, and on her arrival

she had placed it on the table where she could cast tender looks upon it, for Roman women are fond of good wine. Already twice or three times mistrustful of her husband's absence of mind, and the length of his arms, she had said:

"Mind the _boteglia_--you're going to break it."

At last, as she went off to the kitchen to take up with her own hands the famous _estoufato_, she again called out to him:

"Whatever you do, don't break the _boteglia_."

Unluckily, the moment his wife had disappeared, the poet seized the opportunity to talk about art, theatres, success, so freely and with so much gusto and vivacity, that--crash! By a gesture more eloquent than the others, the wonderful bottle was thrown down and fell to the ground in a thousand pieces. Never have I beheld such terror. He stopped short, and became deadly pale. At the same moment, Assunta's contralto was heard in the next room, and the Italian appeared on the threshold with flashing eyes, lips swollen with rage, red with the heat of the kitchen range.

"The _boteglia!_" she roared in a terrible voice.

Then timidly bending down to me, he whispered:

"Say it's you."

And the poor devil was so frightened, that I felt his long legs tremble under the table.



The Project Gutenberg EBook of **ALWAYS A QURONO**, by Jim Harmon

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*You too can be a Qurono. All you need do is
geoplanct. All you need know is when to stop!*

Barnhart sauntered right into the middle of them. He covertly watched the crew close in around him and he never twitched an eyelash. _Officers must never panic_, he reminded himself, and manipulated the morning sighting on the nearest sun through the Fitzgerald lens. It was exactly 900:25:30, Galactic Time.

He jotted the reading in, satisfied. The warm breath tickling the back of his neck was unnerving. If he showed fear and grabbed a blaster from the locker he could probably control them, but he was devastatingly aware that a captain must never show fear.

"Captain Barnhart," Simmons, the mate, drawled politely, "do you still plan on making the jump at 900 thirty?"

The captain removed his eyeglasses and polished the lenses.

"Simmons," he said in comforting, confiding tones, "you are well aware that regulations clearly state that a spaceship that phases in on a star in major trans-spot activity is required to re-phase within twenty-four hours to avoid being caught in turbulence."

"Yes, sir," Simmons said. "But, as I have stated before, it is my belief that regulation means that a ship should phase to avoid the _possibility_ of being caught in an energy storm. We landed right in the middle of one. As you are aware, sir, if we phase now there is an excellent chance we will warp right into the sun!"

Barnhart shook his lean, bronze head wearily. "Simmons, the Admiralty has gone through this thousands of times. Obviously they know our danger is greater by staying where we are. Why, Ignatz 6Y out there may _nova_! We'll have to take our chances."

"No, sir." Simmons thrust his pale, blue-veined jaw at him, his light eyes Nordicly cold below a blond cropping. "The storm spots are dying down. We aren't phasing yet."

Barnhart drew himself up and looked down at the mate. Behind Simmons, York moved closer. The captain was suddenly aware of York's low forehead and muscular, free-swinging arms. It was probably sheer bias, but he had frequently entertained the idea that Englishmen were closer to our apelike ancestor than most people ... the way they ran around painted blue when everybody was civilly wearing clothes and all. Obviously York was incapable of thinking for himself and was willing to do anything Simmons commanded him to do.

It became transparent to Barnhart that they were going to mutiny to avoid following their duty as clearly outlined in regulations. Judging from York's twitching knuckles, they were going to resist by strangling him.

Barnhart wondered if this was the time to show fear and unlock a weapon to defend himself.

York clamped onto him before he could decide on the proper interpretation of the regulations and just as his mind settled on the irresolvable question: If a captain must never show fear, why was he given the key to a hand weapons locker to use when in fear of his life?

* * * * *

Barnhart gazed around the purple clearing with clouded eyes. He trembled in near traumatic shock. It was almost too much to bear.

Regulations clearly stated that no officer was to be marooned on a .9 Earth-type planet at fourteen-forty Galactic Time, early evening local.

Or (he brushed at his forehead) he was damned certain they at least strongly implied it.

But fear was such a foreign element to his daily routine he discarded it.

The scene took him back to his boyhood.

He sorted out the survival supplies, lifting even the portable nuclear generator effortlessly under the .67 gravity, and remembered how he used to go camping regularly every month when he was a Boy Scout. He had been a bookish child, too obsessed with reading, they told him. So he had put himself on a regular schedule for play. Still, it never seemed to make people like him much better. After he established his routine he didn't try to change it--he probably couldn't make things better and he certainly couldn't stand them any worse.

Barnhart paused in his labors and stripped off his soaked uniform shirt, deciding to break out his fatigues. As the wet sleeve turned wrong side out he noticed his wristwatch showed fifteen hundred hours.

As usual he fetched his toothbrush from the personals kit and started to scrub his teeth.

This was when he saw his first quirono in the act of geoplancting.

It was a deeply disturbing experience.

* * * *

Barnhart and the lank, slick-bodied alien ignored each other every morning while the marooned captain had his coffee and the native chronoped; each afternoon while Barnhart laid down for a nap and the other xenogutted; and of course before retiring while Barnhart brushed his teeth and the alien did his regular stint of geoplancting.

The captain sat about arranging living quarters on the planet. The crew of the _Quincey_ had provided him with every necessity except communications gear. Still he was confident he would find a way back and see that Simmons and the rest got the punishment clearly called for in Regulation C-79, Clause II.

This driving need to have the regulation obeyed was as close as he could get to anger.

His lot was a rough and primitive one, but he sat down to doing the best with things that he could. Using the nuclear reactor, he synthesized a crude seven-room cottage. He employed an unorthodox three-story architecture. This gave him a kind of observation tower from which he could watch to see if the natives started to get restless. Traditionally, this would be a bad sign.

Humming to himself, he was idly adding some rococo work around the front door when thirteen-hundred-thirty came up and he stopped for his nap. At the edge of the now somewhat larger clearing the alien was xenogutting in the indigo shadows of a drooping bush-tree. Since he hadn't furnished the house yet, Barnhart stretched out on the grass. Suddenly he sat upright and shot a glance at the alien. Could this sort of thing be regarded as restless activity?

He was safe so long as the aliens maintained their regular routine but if they started to deviate from it he was in trouble.

He tossed around on the velvet blades for some minutes.

He got to his feet.

The nap would have to be by-passed. As much as he resented the intrusion on his regular routine he would have to find some other natives. He had to know if all the aliens on the planet xenogutted each afternoon as he was having his nap.

The thought crossed his mind that he might not wake up some afternoon if his presence was causing the aliens to deviate dangerously from their norm.

* * * *

The most unnerving thing about the village was that there were exactly ten houses and precisely one hundred inhabitants. Each house was 33.3 feet on a side. The surfaces were hand-hewn planking or flat-sided logs. There were four openings: each opposing two were alternately one foot and an alarming ten feet high. Barnhart couldn't see the roof. The buildings appeared square, so he supposed the houses were 33.3 feet tall.

At the end of the single packed, violet-earthed street facing up the road was a large sign of some unidentifiable metal bearing the legend in standard Galactic:

THIS IS A VILLAGE OF QURONOS

Barnhart received the information unenthusiastically. He had never before encountered the term. The sign might as well have told him the place was a town of jabberwockies.

The single scarlet sun with its corona of spectrum frost was drawing low on the forest-covered horizon. Barnhart, dry of mouth and sore of foot, had not encountered yet a single one of the hundred inhabitants. He had missed his nap and his dinner, and now (he ran his tongue over his thick-feeling teeth) he was about to miss his nightly brushing of his teeth. He had taken only a minimum survival kit with him--which did not include a smaller personals kit.

His wristwatch, still on good, reliable ship's time, recorded nearly fifteen hundred hours straight up. His body chemistry was still operating on the Captain's Shift, whereby he spent part of the time with both the day and night shifts. It was nearly time for him to go to bed. Fortunately it was almost night on the planet.

He was searching out his portable force field projector from some loose coins and keys when the one hundred quuronos came out of their houses and began geoplancting.

Fifth Day Marooned

_The Journal of
Captain T. P. Barnhart,
Late of the U.G.S. Quincey_

It becomes apparent that I may never leave alive this planet whose name and co-ordinates have been kept from me. By reason, justice and regulations, the men who put me here must pay (see formal attached warrant against First Mate O. D. Simmons and the remainder of my crew). For this reason and in the interest of science I am beginning this journal, to which I hope to continue contributing from time to time, barring sudden death.

At this writing I am in a village of ten houses identified as a settlement of quuronos. These tall, hairless humanoids have performed an intricate series of indescribable actions since I first encountered them. My problem, as is apparent, is to decide whether these actions constitute their normal daily routine or whether I have instigated this series of actions.

If the latter is the case: where will it all end?

1700: Fifth day

Barnhart was not used to being ignored.

It was certainly not a part of his normal routine. Often in his life he had been scorned and ridiculed. Later, when he earned a captaincy in the exploration service, the men around him had to at least make a show of respect and paying attention to him. Being ignored was a new experience for him. While it was a strange thing to say of an explorer, Barnhart didn't particularly like new experiences ... or rather he only liked the same kind of new experiences.

He kicked the wine-colored soil in red-faced impotence the first few dozen times quuronos went silently past him on the way to gather fruit from the forest, or hew logs to keep the buildings in repairs (which seemed to be a constant occupation.)

However, when the twenty-fifth alien shouldered past him the morning after he first discovered the village, Barnhart caught him by the shoulder, swung him half around and slugged him off his feet with a stabbing right cross.

The alien shook his head foggily a few times and slowly climbed to his feet.

Barnhart bit at his under lip. That hadn't been a wise thing to do at all. He should know that unorthodox moves like that led only to certain disaster. He fumbled for his force-field projector, and with a flush of adrenalin discovered he had lost it.

Now, he thought, the alien will signal the rest of them. And they, all one hundred of them (now does that include the one I first saw in the clearing or not?) they will converge on me and--

The quurono marched off into the forest.

Everyone was still ignoring Barnhart.

* * * * *

Barnhart munched on a steak sandwich listlessly and watched the aliens

through the faint haze of the force field.

He had found the projector half stamped into the earth and he was testing it. But even a test was foolish. None of them was close enough to him to harm him with so much as a communicable disease. He might as well quit roughing it and get back to the cottage.

In the last few days he had had time to think. He took up his journal.

Eighth Day

I can only suppose that these actions of the aliens represent some kind of religious ritual. Again I am presented with the problem of whether these rituals are a part of their normal, daily life, or are they a special series instigated by my presence?

Yesterday I observed two of the quuronos repairing one of the village houses. The native lumber seems to be ill-suited to construction purposes. Several times I have noticed logs tearing themselves free and crawling back into the virgin forest. Due to the instability of their building materials the aliens are constantly having to repair their houses.

In watching the two quuronos at work I observed something highly significant.

The humanoids worked smoothly as a team, splitting and planing down the reluctant logs with double-bladed axes. Then, putting the lumber in place, they fastened it down with triangular wooden pegs. They pounded these pegs home awkwardly with the flat side of the axes.

The axes are crude and obviously indigenous to the culture.

I view this with considerable alarm.

Obviously any culture that can produce an axe is capable of inventing the hammer.

The quuronos are not using their hammers in front of me. I am producing a change in their routine.

Where will it end?

What are they saving their hammers for?

800: Eighth Day

Barnhart had written that just before dawn, but as usual the aliens had continued to ignore him. For all he knew the ritual might go on for

years--before they used their hammers. Or whatever they were planning.

It was drawing near time for his nap, but he felt completely wide awake even inside the safety of the force field. His throat hurt and the backs of his legs ached with the waiting, the waiting for the natives to come out and begin xenogutting.

He wiped his hands together and forced a smile. Why should he worry what the natives did? He was completely safe. He could live out his life in immutable security.

But this wasn't his world. No part of it was his ... or at least only the part he had brought with him. Sanity lay in holding to what was left of his own world. But sanity didn't always mean survival.

What if he could make the quuronos' world his own?

Barnhart wiped at the tiny stings against his face and his fingertips came away moist with beads of perspiration.

The aliens began marching out of the houses, in twos from the ten-foot doors, singly from the foot-square openings of every other facing wall.

It wasn't his world of fire-works-streaked Ohio summers and bold green hills, this planet cowed with nun-like secrecy, looking acrid, tasting violet and transmitting a beauty and confusion only a trio of physical scientists could solve.

But there was only one thing to do.

Barnhart let down his force field and went out.

The human body wasn't well-adapted for it but Barnhart did his best to join the quuronos in xenogutting.

Instantly the cry welled up.

"_Master._"

Barnhart stood up and faced the aliens, deeply disturbed.

* * * * *

He was even more disturbed when, later, he wrote again in his journal:

Ninth day

"Qurono," I have learned from the Leader, is a term referring to a particular type of sub-human android. The synthetic process used in manufacturing these men does not allow them to develop beyond a

certain point--a built-in safety factor of their creators, I can only suppose. Thus they were given the concept of the axe and have retained it, but they were able only to devise the idea of using the axe to hammer things with and are not capable of thinking of a special hammering tool.

With almost complete lack of creative ability they are bound to the same routine, to which they adhere with an almost religious fanaticism.

Since last night I have been treated as virtually a god. I have been given one of their buildings entirely for my own use.

I find this turn of events absolutely surprising. I intend to discuss this with the Leader today. (Note to any ethnologist who may see these papers: Since all quuronos are built to the same standards none is superior to another. But, recognizing the need for one director, each of the one hundred has an alternate term as Leader.)

900: Ninth day

Despite the upsetting turn of events Barnhart decided he was more comfortable in his familiar role of command.

He glanced at his wristwatch and was surprised to note that he had overslept. The time for both breakfast and chronopting was past. He made himself ready and left the building.

The alien was waiting just outside the door. He looked as if he hadn't moved all night. Yet, Barnhart thought, he seemed a trifle shorter.

"Are you the Leader?" Barnhart asked.

"I am the Leader. But you are the Master."

As an officer of a close-confines spaceship that sounded a little stuffy even to Barnhart. The fellow _still_ looked shorter. Maybe they had changed Leaders the way he had been told the night before. Or maybe quuronos shrank when left out in the night air.

"Let's go someplace where we can sit down. And, incidentally, just call me 'sir' or 'captain.'"

"Yes, sir."

Barnhart nodded. He had been expecting: Yes, Master, I will call you 'captain.'

But the alien didn't move. He finally decided that the Leader thought

they could sit on the ground where they were standing.

Barnhart squatted.

The Leader squatted.

Before they could speak a muffled explosion vibrated the ground and Barnhart caught a fleeting glimpse of an unstable chemical rocket tearing jerkily into the maroon sky.

"Celebration for my arrival?" Barnhart asked.

"Perhaps so. We are putting the un-needed ones in status."

He decided to let that ride for the moment.

"Tell me, why didn't you recognize me before I joined you in your--ritual, Leader?"

The alien tilted his head. "What was there to recognize? We thought you were some new variety of animal. Before you xenogutted how were we to know you were rational life?"

Barnhart nodded. "But how did you so cleverly deduce that I was your Master?"

"There are one hundred of us. You were the one hundred and first. You had to be the Master returned."

The Master had been some friendly lifeform in the Federation, obviously. Otherwise the qurono androids wouldn't speak Galactic. Barnhart nibbled on his under lip.

"I want to find out how much you still know after the Master has been away so long," the captain said. "Tell me, how do you communicate with the Master?"

"What for?" The Leader began to look at Barnhart oddly.

"For anything. Where's the sub-space radio?"

The direct approach produced a rather ironic expression on the qurono's narrow face but no answer. But if there was a radio on the planet Barnhart meant to find it. Spacemen forced to abandon their craft were required to report to the nearest Federation base as quickly as possible. Besides, he meant to see that Simmons and his Anglo stooge and all the others paid for their mutiny. But, he decided, perhaps he had better not press the matter at the moment.

Another rocket punctuated the moment of silence.

"Take me to your launching area," Barnhart said.

The android stood up and walked. But he walked at Barnhart's side, forcing the captain to catch his stride a half-step to let the alien lead him. He wasn't sure if it was a mark of respect not to get ahead of the Master or an attempt to see if he knew where the launching site was located. The quuronos were limited, but just _how_ limited Barnhart was beginning to wonder.

* * * *

They rounded the clump of drooping lavender trees and Barnhart saw the eight men laying on the ground in the transparent casings. Not men, but quuronos, he corrected himself; in a molded clear membrane of some sort.

"They are in status," the Leader explained, answering the captain's unasked question.

"This is how you keep your population at one hundred," Barnhart thought aloud, removing his glasses to rest his eyes and to get a better look at the bodies. Despite regulations he could still see better without his spectacles.

"It is how you arranged it, Master. But as you know we are now ninety and one."

The captain put his glasses back on. "I'll test you. Why are you now ninety and one?"

"Naturally," the Leader said emotionlessly, "you required a whole shelter unit to yourself. We had to dispose of the ten who previously had the unit."

Barnhart swallowed. "Couldn't you think of anything less drastic? Next time just build a new unit."

"But master," the alien protested, "it takes a great deal of work to construct our units. Our lumber escapes so badly no matter how often we beat it into submission. Our work capacity is limited, as you are aware. Is it really desirable to overwork us so much?"

The captain was a little shocked. Was this humorless, methodical android really protesting a command from his Master? "How do you suppose the ten you are putting in status feel about it?" he managed.

"They would doubtlessly prefer not to be overworked. Our fatigue channels can only stand so much."

But it wasn't the work, Barnhart suddenly knew. It was the idea that

there could be _eleven_ houses, instead of ten. The concept of only ninety quuronos and a master must be only slightly less hideous to them. They couldn't really be so overjoyed to see him.

A third rocket jarred off, rising unsteadily but surely in the low gravity. It was a fairly primitive device--evidently all they retained from the original model supplied them by the Master.

Barnhart looked at the figures on the ground. Only seven.

"The ones in status go into the rockets!" Barnhart gasped.

"And circle in the proper orbits," the Leader agreed.

This time he saw the quuronos lifting a stiff form and taking it to the crude rocket. It looked entirely too much like a human body. Barnhart looked away.

But at the edge of his peripheral vision he saw the quuronos halt and stand up their fellow in status. He glanced at his wrist. Fifteen hundred hours. The aliens began geoplancting.

Barnhart ran his tongue over his teeth, noting that they needed brushing. He came to himself with a start.

Of course. He had almost forgot.

Barnhart faced the others and joined them in geoplancting.

A hideous cry built from one plateau of fury to another.

"_He's no better than us!_" the Leader screamed.

Ninth day

I have made a serious mistake.

While it was necessary for me to conform to the quuronos' ritual to get myself recognized, I should not have continued to adhere to it. Apparently by these creatures' warped reasoning I established myself as a reasoning creature by first joining them in their routine; but when I continued to act in accord with them I proved myself no better than they are. As Master I am supposed to be superior and above their mundane routine.

At the moment they are milling belligerently outside my force-field screen. As I look into their stupid, imaginationless faces I can only think that somewhere in the past they were invented by some unorthodox Terran scientist, probably of English descent. They--

Wait.

The force field. It's wavering. It must have been damaged when it got tramped underfoot. They are going to get in to me. It--

Barnhart watched them prepare the rocket that would blast him into an orbit circling the planet. He could see and even hear the sound that vibrated through the thin membrane in which he was encased, but he could not move a nerve-end. Fortunately his eyes were focused on infinity, so he could see everything at least blurrily.

The Leader, who seemed to have grown a few inches, wasted no time. He gave the orders and the quuronos lifted him into the rocket. The hatch closed down on the indigo day and he was alone.

The blast of takeoff almost deafened him but he didn't feel the jar--only because, he realized, he could feel nothing.

A few weeks later the centrifugal force of the spinning rocket finally nudged the latch and the hatch swung open. Barnhart was exposed to naked fire-bright blackness itself.

After a day or two he stopped worrying about that, as he had stopped fretting about breathing.

He grew accustomed to the regular turn around the planet every fourteen hours. For two out of every three seconds he faced out into space and that was always changing. Yet, all poetry aside, the change was always the same.

He didn't have to worry about keeping on a schedule. He kept on one automatically.

And he didn't like it.

So he kept retreating further and further from it....

* * * * *

"We couldn't leave him there!"

What? Who? Barnhart thought along with at least seven other double-yous. He returned to himself and found that he was standing in the airlock of a spaceship, faced by his first mate Simmons and his stooge York.

"We couldn't leave him there," Simmons repeated with feeling. "That would be the nastiest kind of murder. We might maroon him. But none of us are killers."

"It's not the punishment we will get for the mutiny," York complained. "It's having to go back to his old routine. That time-schedule mind of his was derailing mine. He was driving the whole crew cockeyed. Even if he wasn't going to kill us all by the rule book, I think we would have had to maroon him just to get rid of him."

Simmons fingered a thin-bladed tool knife. "I wonder how he got up there in that rocket and in this transparent shroud? I'm sure he's alive, but this is the most unorthodox Susp-An I've ever seen. Almost makes you believe in destiny, the way we lost our coordinate settings and had to back-track--and then found him out there. (I'll bet he jimmied the calculator," York grouched.) You know, York, it's almost as if the world down there marooned him right back at us."

The first mate inserted the knife blade. The membrane withered and Barnhart lived.

"Now the arrest," York murmured.

"What are you muttering about, York?" Captain Barnhart demanded. "What are we standing around here for? You can't expect me to waste a whole afternoon on inspection. We have to get back on schedule." He looked to his wrist. "Fifteen hundred hours."

"He doesn't _remember_," York said behind him.

"He remembers the same old routine," Simmons said. "Here we go again."

Barnhart didn't say anything. In the close confines of a spaceship there was bound to be a certain degree of informality.

He stepped inside his cabin at the end of the corridor and did what he always did at fifteen hundred hours.

York and the first mate were deeply disturbed.

Barnhart looked out at them sharply. "Well, spacemen, I run a taut ship here. I expect everyone to hit the mark. Adhere to the line. Follow my example. Snap to it!"

Simmons looked at York and his shoulders sagged. They couldn't go through the whole thing again, the marooning, the rescue, then this. That routine would drive them crazy.

Even this was preferable.

They joined Barnhart in geoplancting.



WHAT IS THAT IN THINE HAND?

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Friendship Village*, by Zona Gale

"Busy, busy, busy, busy all the day. Busy, busy, busy. And busy ..."

"There goes Ellen Ember, crazy again," we said, when we heard that cry of hers, not unmelodious nor loud, echoing along Friendship streets.

Then we usually ran to the windows and peered at her. Sometimes her long hair would be unbound on her shoulders, sometimes her little figure would be leaping lightly up as she caught at the lowest boughs of the curb elms, and sometimes her hand would be moving swiftly back and forth above her heart.

"If your heart is broken," she had explained to many, "you can lace it together with 'Busy, busy, busy ...' Sing it and see! Or mebbe your heart is all of a piece?"

Once, when I had gone to Miss Liddy's house, I had found Ellen in a skirt fashioned of an old plaid shawl of her father's, her bare shoulders wound in the rosy "nubia" that had been her mother's, and she was dancing in the dining-room, with surprising grace, as Pierrette might have danced in Carnival, and singing, in a sweet, piping voice, an incongruous little song:--

O Day of wind and laughter,
A goddess born are you,
Whose eyes are in the morning
Blue--blue!

"I made that up," she had explained, "or I guess mebbe I remembered it from deep in my skull. I like the feel of it in my mouth when I speak the words."

I used to think that Miss Liddy was really a less useful citizen than Ellen. For though Miss Liddy worked painstakingly at her dressmaking, and even dreamed over it little partial dreams, Ellen, mad or sane, made a garden, and threw little nosegays over our fences, and exercised a certain presence, latent in the rest of us, which made us momentarily

gentle and in awe of our own sanity.

When, one spring morning, a week before the Friendship Carnival, she passed down Daphne Street with her plaintive, musical "Busy, busy, busy ..." Doctor June and the young Reverend Arthur Bliss sat on Doctor June's screened-in porch discussing a deficit in the Good Shepherd's Orphans' Home fund for the fiscal year. Ever since the wreck of the Through, Friendship had contributed to the support of the Home,--having first understood then that the Home was its patient pensioner,--and now it was almost like a compliment that we had been appealed to for help.

Doctor June listened with serene patience to what his visitor would say.

"Tension," said the Reverend Arthur Bliss, squaring his splendid young shoulders, "tension. Warfare. We, as a church, are enormously equipped. We have--shall we say?--the helmets of our intelligence and the swords of our wills. Why, the joy of the fight ought to be to us like that of a strong man ready to do battle, oughtn't it--oughtn't it?"

Doctor June, his straight white hair outlining his plump pink face, nodded; but one would have said that it was rather less at the Reverend Arthur than at his Van Houtii spiræa, which nodded back at him.

"My young friend," said Doctor June, "will you forgive me for saying that it is fairly amazing to me how the church of God continues to use the terms of barbarism? We talk of the peace that passeth understanding, and yet we keep on employing metaphors of blood-red war. What does the modern church want of a helmet and a sword, if I may ask? Even rhetorically?"

"The Christian life is an eternal warfare against the forces of sin, is it not?" asked the Reverend Arthur Bliss in surprise.

"Let me suggest," said Doctor June, "that all good life is an eternal surrender to the forces of good. There's a difference."

The visitor from the city smiled very reverently.

"I see, sir," he said, "that you are one of those wonderful non-combatants. You are by nature sanctified--and that I can well believe."

"I am by nature a miserable old sinner," rejoined the doctor, warmly. "Often--often I would enjoy a fine round Elizabethan oath--note how that single adjective condones my poor taste. But I hold that good is inflowing and that it possesses whom it may possess. If a man is too busy fighting, it may pass him by."

"But surely, sir," said the young clergyman, "you agree with me that a man wins his way into the kingdom of light by both a staff and a sword?"

"You will perhaps forgive me for agreeing with nothing of the sort," said the doctor, mildly; "I hold that a man takes his way to the light by grasping whatever the Lord puts in his hand--a hammer, a rope, a pen--and grasping it hard."

"But the ungifted--what of the ungifted?" cried the Reverend Arthur Bliss.

"In this sense, there are none," said Doctor June, briefly.

"Busy, busy, busy all the day. Busy, busy, busy ..." sounded suddenly from the street in Ellen's thin soprano. Doctor June looked down at her, his expression scarcely changing, because it was always serenely soft. But the young clergyman saw with amazement the strange little figure with her unbound hair and her arms high and swaying, and as she took some steps of her dance before the gate, he questioned his host with uplifted brows.

"A little mad," the doctor said, nodding, "like us all. She sings in the streets of a glad morning, and dances now and then. We take ours out in tangential opinions. It is nearly the same thing."

The young clergyman's face lighted responsively at this, and then he deferentially clinched his argument.

"There is a case in point," said he. "That poor creature there--what has the Lord put in her hand?"

Doctor June looked thoughtful.

"Nothing," he declared, "for any fight. But I'm not sure that she isn't made to be a leaven. The kingdom of God works like a leaven, you know, my dear young friend. Not like a dum-dum bullet."

"But--that poor creature. A leaven?" doubted the Reverend Arthur Bliss.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Doctor June, "I shouldn't wonder. I'm not so sure as I used to be that I can recognize leaven at first sight."

"Ah, that's it!" cried his guest. "But a soldier, now, is a soldier!"

Then they smiled their lack of acquiescence, and went back to the figures for the fiscal year.

An hour later Doctor June stood alone on his garden walk, aimlessly poking about among his slips. He had done what he always did, following close on the heels of his well-established resolution never to do it again. He had pledged himself to try to raise one hundred dollars in Friendship for a pet philanthropy.

"It's a kind of dissipation with me," he said, helplessly, and wandered down to his gate. "If I read an article about the Congo Free State or Women in India, it acts on me like brandy. I go off my head and give away my substance, and involve innocent people. But then, of course, this is different. It is always different."

Then he heard Ellen's little song again. "Busy, busy, busy ..." she sang, and came round the corner from the town, catching at the lowest branches of the curb elms and laughing a little. At Doctor June's gate she halted and shook some lilacs at him.

"Here," she said, "put some on your coat for a patch on your heart so's the break won't show. Ain't the Lord made the sun shine down this morning? Did you know there's a Carnival comin' to town?"

"Like enough, Ellen," said Doctor June. "Like enough."

"_Is_ one," she persisted. "They said about it in the Post-Office--I heard 'em. Dancin', an' parrots, an' jumpin' dogs."

He stood looking at her thoughtfully as she arranged her flowers, singing under breath.

"Ellen," he said, "will you tell Miss Liddy a few of us are going to meet here in my yard to-morrow afternoon, to talk over some money-raising? And ask her to come?"

"I will," Ellen sang it, "I will an' I will. Did you mean me to come, too?" she broke off wistfully.

"My stars, yes!" said Doctor June. "You're going to come early and help me, aren't you? I took that for granted."

"Here's your lilacs," said Ellen, tossing him a nosegay. "I'll tell Liddy while she's eatin'. Liddy don't like me to talk much when she's workin'. But when she eats I can talk, an' I'll tell her then."

She went on, singing, and Doctor June shook his head.

"I don't know but Mr. Bliss is right," he said, "though I hope I can keep my doubts to myself and not brag about 'em, just to be the style. But it does look as if poor Ellen Ember came into the world empty-handed. As if the Lord didn't give her much of anything to work _with_."

Summons to a meeting to talk over money-raising is, in Friendship, like the call to festivity in a different life. The cause never greatly matters. Interests appear eclectically to range from ice to coral. For let the news get about that there is to be a bazaar for China, a home

bakery sale for the missionary station at Trebizond, or a Japanese tea for the Friendship cemetery fund, and we all sew or bake or lend dishes or sell tickets with the same infinity of zeal. The enterprise in hand absorbs our sense of the ultimate object; as when, after three days of hand-to-hand battle to wrest money for the freedmen from the patrons of a Kirmess at the old roller-skating rink, dear Mis' Amanda, secretary and door-tender, handed over our \$64.85 with the wondering question:--

"What do they mean by Freegman, anyway? What country is it they live in?"

It was no marvel that Doctor June's garden was filled, that yellow afternoon, with many eager for action. Some of us knew that there was an Orphans' Home fund deficit; but more of us knew only that we were to "talk over some money-raising." I remember how, from the garden seat against the spiræa, the doctor faced us, all scattered about the antlered walk and its triangle of green, erect on golden oak and bright velvet chairs from within doors. And when he had told us of the shortage to which we were party, instantly the talk emptied into channels of possible pop-corn social, chicken-pie supper, rummage sale, art and loan exhibit, Old Settlers' Entertainment, and so on. After which Doctor June rose, and stood touching thoughtfully at the leaves which grew nearest, while he essayed to turn our minds from chicken-pot-pie-part-veal, and bib-aprons, to the eternal verities.

"My friends," he said, "isn't there a better way? Let us, this time, give of our hearts' love to the little children of God, instead of buying pies and freezing ice cream in His name."

There was, of course, an instant's hush in the garden. We were not used to paradoxes, and we felt as concave images must feel when they first look upon the world. It was as amazing as if we had been told that God grieves with us instead of afflicting us, as we held.

"None of us has much money to give," Doctor June went on; "let us take the way that lies nearest our hand, and make a little money. God never permitted any normal human creature to come into His world unprovided with some means of making it better. Only, let us get outside our bazaar and chicken-pie faculties. Now what can we each do?"

We sat still for a little, tentatively murmuring; and then Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss stood up by the sweet-alyssum urn.

"Speakin' of what we can do," she said, "doin' ain't easy. Not when you're well along in years. Your ways seem to stiffen up some. When I was a girl, I could 'a' been quite an elocutionist if I could 'a' had lessons. I had a reg'lar born sense o' givin' gestures. But I never took. An' now I declare I don't know of anything I could do. It's the same way, I guess, with quite a number of us."

Mis' Postmaster Sykes was in the arm-chair, and she sat still, queenly.

"I could do some o' my embroidery," she observed, "but it's quite expensive stuff, an' I don't know whether it would sell rill well here in Friendship. I'd be 'most afraid to risk. An' I don't do enough cookin', myself, to what-you-might-say know how, any more."

"Same with my sewing," observed Mis' Doctor Helman; "I put it all out now. I don't know as I could sew up a seam. That's the trouble, hiring everything done so."

Those who did not hire everything done preserved a respectful silence. And Doctor June looked up in the elm trees.

"The Lord," he said, "spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. The Lord said unto Moses, 'What is that in thine hand?' Moses had, you remember, nothing but a rod in his hand. But it was enough to let the people know that God had been with him--that the Lord had appeared unto him. Suppose the glory of the Lord, here in the garden, should ask us now, as it does ask, 'What is that in thine hand?' What have we got?"

There was silence again, and we looked at one another doubtfully.

"Land, Doctor!" said Libbie Liberty then, "I been tryin' for two years to earn a new parlour carpet, an' I ain't had nothin' in my hand to earn with. So I keep on sayin' I like an old Brussels carpet--they're so easy to sweep."

"My!" said Abigail Arnold, "I declare, I'd be real put to it to try to make extry money. 'Bout the only thing the Lord seems to 'a' put in my hand is time. I've got oodles o' that, layin' 'round loose."

Mis' Photographer Sturgis was in the big garden chair, wrapped in a shawl, her feet on an inverted flower-pot.

"I'm tryin' to think," she said, looking sidewise at the ground. "I donno's I know how I could earn a cent, convenient. It ain't real easy for women to earn. I think mebbe the Lord meant the men to be the Moseses."

Mis' Amanda Toplady's voice rolled out, deep and comfortable, like a complaisant giant's.

"Well said!" she remarked. "I'm drove to death all day. If anybody's to ask me what I got in my hand, I declare I guess I'd say, rill reverent: Dear Lord, I've got my hands full, an' that's about all I have got."

So we went on, saying much or little as was our nature, but we were all agreed that we were virtually helpless--for Calliope was out of town that week, and not present to shame us.

"What's in my hands?" said grim Miss Liddy Ember, finally, in her thin falsetto. "Well, I ain't got any rill, what-you-might-call hands. I just got kind o' cat's paws for my three meals a day an' my rent."

Then, by her sister's side, Ellen Ember stood up. We had hardly noticed her, sitting there quietly playing with some of the doctor's flowers. But now we saw that she had hurriedly twisted her splendid hair about her head, and by this we understood that she was herself again. We had seen her come to herself like this on the street, and then she would go hurrying home, the tears running down her face in shame for her unbound hair and her singing and dancing. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were shining as she rose now, and she looked appealingly pretty, one hand, palm outward, half hiding her trembling mouth. By her soft eyes, too, we knew that she was herself again.

"You all know," she began, and dare not trust herself. "You all know ..." she said once more, and we understood what she would say. "What can I do?" she cried to us. "What is there I can do? I ain't got anything but my craziness! Oh, it seems like I _ain't_ much, an' so I'd ought to _do_ all the more."

To soothe her, we took our woman's way of all talking at once. And then Doctor June called out cheerily that he felt the way Ellen did, that he wasn't a real Moses, for what had he--Doctor June--in his hand, and didn't we all know there was no money in pills? And then he told us how the Reverend Arthur Bliss was to be in town again on Wednesday of the next week, and would we not all think the matter over quietly, and meet with them on that evening, for cakes and tea?

"As many of you as can," he said, "come with a plan to earn a dollar, and tell how you mean to do it. Ellen, you and I'll preside at the meeting, and hear what the rest say, and keep real still ourselves, like proper officers."

But Ellen Ember would not be comforted. She stood with that one hand, palm outward, pressed against her lips, looking at us with big, brimming eyes.

"I ain't got nothin' but my craziness, you know," she said over. And then, as she was going through the gateway, she turned to Doctor June.

"Why, Wednesday's the first night o' the Carnival!" she cried. "You set the dollar meetin' on the first night o' the Carnival!"

"My stars!" cried Doctor June, gravely. "And I might have been selling pills on the grounds!"

* * * * *

All Friendship Village loves a Carnival. Once the word meant to me a Florentine fiesta day, with a feast of colour, and of many little fine things, "real, like laughter." Now when I say "carnival" I mean the painted eruption by night from the market square of some town like Friendship, when lines broaden and waver grotesquely, when the mirth is in great silhouettes and Colour goes unmasked.

I always make my way to such a place, for it holds for me the wonder of the untoward; as will a strolling Italian plodding past my house at night with his big, silent bear; or the spectacle of the huge, faded red ice-wagon, with powerful horses and rattling chains and tongs, and giants in blue denim atop the crystal; or the strange, copper world that dissolves in the fluid of certain sunsets. And that Wednesday night, a week later, on my way to the "dollar meeting" at Doctor June's, I turned toward the Friendship Carnival with some vestige of my youth clinging to the hem of things.

I gave my attention to them all: The pop-corn wagon, an aristocratic affair that looked like a hearse; the little painted canaries and love-birds, so out of place and patient that I thought they must have souls to form as well as we; the sad little live monkey, incessantly dodging white balls thrown at him by certain immortals (who, when they hit him, got pipes); and the giant who flung "Look! Look! Look! Look!" through a megaphone, while a good little dog toiled up a ladder and then stood at the ladder's top in a silence that was all nice reticence and dignity. Also, the huge Saxon fellow who, at the portal of the Arabian Court of Art and Regular Café Restaurant, sang a love-song through a megaphone--"Tenderly, dearest, I breathe thy sweet name," he hallooed, with his free hand beckoning the crowd to the Court of Art.

And then I saw the Lyric Dance Arcade and Indian Palace of Asiatic Mystery. And I found myself close to the platform, listening to the cry of a man in gilt knickerbockers.

"Ladies! Gentlemen! All!" he summoned. "Never in the history of the show business has there been anything resemblin' this. Come here--here--here--here! See Zorah, queen of the West and princess of the East, who is about to begin one of her most sublimely sensational dances. See her, see her, you may never again see her! Graceful, glittering, genteel. Graceful, glittering, gen-te-e-e-l. I am telling you about Zorah, queen of the West and princess of the East, in her ancient Asiatic dance, the most up-to-date little act in the entire show business to-day. Here she is, waiting for you--you--you. Everybody that's got the dime!"

Until he ceased, I had hardly noticed Zorah herself, standing in the canvas portico. The woman had, I then observed, a kind of appealing prettiness and a genuineness of pose. She was looking out on the crowd with the usual manner of simulated shyness, but to the shyness was given conviction by an uplifted hand, palm outward, hiding her mouth. I noted

her small, stained face, her splendid unbound hair--and then a certain resemblance caught at my heart. And I saw that she was wearing a skirt made of a man's plaid shawl, and about her shoulders was a rosy, old-fashioned nubia. Her face and throat were stained, and so were her thin little arms--but I knew her.

The performance, as the man had said, was about to begin, and already he was giving Zorah her signal to go within. Somehow I bought a ticket and hurried into the tent. The seats were sparingly occupied, and I saw, as I would have guessed, no one whom I knew in the eager, stamping little audience. In their midst I lost the slim figure that had preceded me, until she mounted the platform and swept before the footlights a stately courtesy.

And there, in the smoky little tent, Ellen Ember began to dance, with her quite surprising grace--as Pierrette might have danced in Carnival. It was the charming, faery measure which she had danced for me in Miss Liddy's dining-room; and as she had sung to me then, so now, in a sweet piping voice, she sang her incongruous little song:--

O Day of wind and laughter,
A goddess born are you,
Whose eyes are in the morning
Blue--blue!
The slumbrous noon your body is,
Your feet are the shadow's flight,
But the immortal soul of you
Is Night.

It seemed to me that I sat for hours in that hot little place, cut off from the world, watching. Again and again, to the brass blare of some hoiden tune, she set the words of the lyric that "she liked the feel of," and she danced on and on. And when at last the music shattered off, and she ceased, and ran behind a screening canvas, somehow I made my way forward through the crowd that was clapping hands and calling her back, and I gained the place where she stood.

When I asked her to come with me, she nodded and smiled, with unseeing eyes, and assented quite simply, and then suddenly sat down before the lifted tent flap.

"But I must wait for my money," she said. "That's what I came for--my money. They thought I'd never earn my dollar, but I have."

At this I understood. And now I marvel how I talked at all to the man in gilt knickerbockers who arrived and haggled over the whole matter.

Zorah, he explained, the sure-enough Zorah, had took down sick in the last place they made, an' they'd had to leave her behind. An' when he told about it down town that morning, this little piece here had up an'

offered. Somethin' had to be done--he left it to me if they didn't. He felt his duty to the amusement park public, him. So he had closed with her for a dollar for three fifteen-minute turns--he give two shillings a turn, on the usual, but she'd hung out stout for the even money. An' she'd danced her three, odd but satisfactory. You could hand 'em queer things in the show business, if you only dressed the part. Yes, sure, here was the dollar. Be on hand to-morrow night? No? Sufferin' snakes, but was we goin' to leave him shipwrecked?

Finally I got her away, and skirted the market-place with her dancing at my side, shaking her silver dollar in her shut palms and singing:--

"Busy, busy, busy all the day. An' then I earned my dollar, my dollar--they never thought I'd earn my dollar ..."

I remember, as we struck into the unlighted block where Miss Liddy's house stood, that I was struggling hard for my own serenity, so that for a moment I did not observe that Ellen stopped beside me. But I knew that she fell silent, and when I turned I saw her there on the dark walk hurriedly twisting her splendid hair about her head. And by that and by her silence I understood that she was suddenly herself, and of her own mind, as we say.

On this, "Ellen!" said I quickly, "how fine of you to have earned your Orphans' Home dollar so soon. But you have beaten us all!"

She had contrived to fasten her hair, and I saw her touching tentatively the folds of her strange dress. And so I made her know what she had done, as gently as I might, and with all praise I stilled her dismay and shame. And last I led her, as I was determined that I would do, past Miss Liddy's dark little house and on to the home of Doctor June.

I think that I would not have dared take Ellen, just as she was, in her plaid skirt and her rosy nubia, into that black and brown henrietta-cloth assembly, if I had remembered that there was to be a stranger present. But this, in the events of the hour, I had quite forgotten. I remembered as I entered the room and came face to face with the Reverend Arthur Bliss, talking of the figures for the fiscal year.

"--and the deficit," he was saying, "ought to be made up by us who are so well equipped to do it. With Paul, let us fight the good fight--of every day. This is to-day's fight. Now let us talk over our various weapons."

Doctor June looked thoughtfully at his young guest, and in the older face was a brooding tenderness, like the tenderness of the father who longs to hold the child in quiet, in his arms.

"Yes," said Doctor June, "'fighting' is one name for it. I am tempted to say that 'drudgery' is another name. Errantry, ministry, service, or

whatever. It all comes to the same thing: 'What is that in thine hand?' Well, now, who of us is first?"

"I think," said I then, "that Ellen Ember is first."

She would have shrunk back from the doorway to the passage, but I put my arm about her, and then I told them. And when I had done, I remember how she threw up that pathetic hand of hers, palm outward, and this time it was over her eyes.

"I'm a disgrace to all of you!" she said, sobbing, "an' to the whole Good Shepherd's Home. But I guess anyhow it's all the way I had. Seems like I ain't got nothin' in the world but my craziness!"

There was silence for a moment, that rich silence which flowers in the heart. And then great Mis' Amanda Toplady spoke out, in her deep voice which now she some way contrived to keep firm.

"Well said!" she cried. "I come here to say I'd give a dollar outright to get red o' the whole thing, rather'n to fuss. But now I ain't goin' to stop at a dollar. Seems like a dollar for me wouldn't be moral. I'm goin' to sell some strawberry plants--why, we got hundreds of 'em to spare. I can do it by turnin' my hand over. An' I expec' the Lord meant you should turn your hand over to find out what's in it, anyway."

I think that then we tried our woman's way of all talking at once, but I remember how the shrill voice of Abigail Arnold, of the home bakery, rose above the others:--

"Cream puffs!" she cried. "I got a rush demand for my cream puffs every Sat'day, an' I ain't been makin' 'em sole--because I hate to run after the milk an' set it. An' I was goin' to get out o' this by givin' fifty cents out o' the bakery till. An' me with my hands full o' cream puffs...."

"Hens--hens is what mine is," Libbie Liberty was saying. "My grief, I got both hands full o' hens. I wouldn't sell 'em because I can't bear to hev any of 'em killed--they're tame as a bag o' feathers, all of 'em. I guess I ben settin' the hens o' my hand over against the heathen an' the orphans. An' now I'm goin' to sell spring chickens...."

Mis' Sturgis in the rocking-chair was waving a corner of her shawl.

"C-canaries!" she cried. "I can rise canary-birds an' sell 'em a dollar apiece in the city. I m-meant to slide out account o' my health, but it was just because I hate to muss 'round b-boilin' eggs for the little ones. I'll raise a couple or two--mebbe more."

"My good land!" came Miss Liddy Ember's piping falsetto; "to think o' my sittin' up, hesitatin', when new dresses just falls off the ends o' my

fingers. An' me in my right mind, too."

Dear Doctor June stood up among us, his face shining.

"Bless us," he said. "Didn't I have some spiræa in my hand right while I stood talking to you the other afternoon in my garden? And haven't I got some tricolored Barbary varieties of chrysanthemums, and some hardy roses and one thing and another to make men marvel? And can't I sell 'em in the city at a pretty profit? What I've got in my hand is seeds and slips--I see that plain enough. And my stars, out they go!"

Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, Mis' Mayor Uppers, even Mis' Postmaster Sykes--ah, they all knew what to do, knew it as if somebody had been saying it over and over, and as if they now first listened.

But Ellen Ember sat crying, her face buried in her hands. And I think that she cannot have understood, even when Doctor June touched her hair and said something of the little leaven which leaveneth the whole lump.

Last, the Reverend Arthur Bliss arose, and there was a sudden hush among us, for it was as if a new spirit shone in his strong young face.

"Dear friends," he said, "dear friends ..." And then, "Lord God," he prayed abruptly, "show me what is that in my hand--thy tool where I had looked for my sword!"



KING THRUSHBEARD

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*

A King had a daughter who was beautiful beyond all measure, but so proud and haughty withal that no suitor was good enough for her. She sent away one after the other, and made fun of them as well.

Once the King gave a great feast and invited thereto, from far and near, all the young men likely to marry. They were marshalled in a row according to their rank and standing. First came the Kings, then the Grand-dukes, then the Princes, the Earls, the Barons, and the gentry.

Then the King's Daughter was led through the ranks, but to every one she had some objection to make. One was too fat, "The wine-cask," she said. Another was too tall, "Long and thin has little in." The third was too short, "Short and thick is never quick." The fourth was too pale, "As pale as death." The fifth too red, "A fighting-cock." The sixth was not straight enough, "A green log dried behind the stove."

So she had something to say against every one. But she made herself especially merry over a good King, who stood quite high up in the row, and whose chin had grown a little crooked. "Well," she cried and laughed, "he has a chin like a thrush's beak!" and from that time he got the name of King Thrushbeard.

But the old King, when he saw that his daughter did nothing but mock people, and despised all the suitors who were gathered there, was very angry, and swore that she should have for her husband the very first beggar that came to his doors.

A few days afterward, a fiddler came and sang beneath the windows, trying to earn a small alms. When the King heard him, he said, "Let him come up."

So the fiddler came up, in his dirty, ragged clothes, and sang before the King and his daughter. When he had ended he asked for a trifling gift.

The King said, "Your song has pleased me so well that I will give you my daughter there, to wife."

The King's Daughter shuddered, but the King said, "I have taken an oath to give you to the very first beggar man, and I will keep it."

All she could say was in vain; the priest was brought, and she had to let herself be wedded to the fiddler on the spot.

When that was done the King said, "Now it is not proper for you, a beggar woman, to stay any longer in my palace, you may go away with your husband."

The beggar man led her out by the hand, and she was obliged to go away on foot with him. When they came to a large forest she asked, "To whom does that beautiful forest belong?"

"It belongs to King Thrushbeard. If you had taken him, it would have been yours."

"Ah, unhappy girl that I am! If I had but taken King Thrushbeard!"

Afterward, they came to a meadow, and she asked again, "To whom does

this beautiful green meadow belong?”

“It belongs to King Thrushbeard. If you had taken him, it would have been yours.”

“Ah, unhappy girl that I am! If I had but taken King Thrushbeard!”

Then they came to a large town, and she asked again, “To whom does this fine large town belong?”

“It belongs to King Thrushbeard. If you had taken him, it would have been yours.”

“Ah, unhappy girl that I am! If I had but taken King Thrushbeard!”

“It does not please me,” said the fiddler, “to hear you always wishing for another husband. Am I not good enough for you?”

At last they came to a very little hut, and she said, “Oh, goodness! what a small house! To whom does this miserable, mean hovel belong?”

The fiddler answered, “That is my house and yours, where we shall live together.”

She had to stoop in order to go in at the low door. “Where are the servants?” said the King’s Daughter.

“What servants?” answered the beggar man. “You must do what you wish to have done. Just make a fire at once, and set on water to cook my supper. I am quite tired.”

But the King’s Daughter knew nothing about lighting fires or cooking, and the beggar man had to lend a hand himself to get anything fairly done. When they had finished their scanty meal they went to bed; but he forced her to get up quite early in the morning in order to look after the house.

For a few days, they lived in this way as well as might be, and ate up all the food in the house.

Then the man said, “Wife, we cannot go on any longer eating and drinking here and earning nothing. You must weave baskets.”

He went out, cut some willows, and brought them home. Then she began to weave, but the tough willows wounded her delicate hands.

“I see that this will not do,” said the man; “you had better spin; perhaps you can do that.”

She sat down and tried to spin, but the hard thread soon cut her soft

fingers so that the blood ran down.

“See,” said the man, “you are fit for no sort of work. I have made a bad bargain with you. Now, I will try to earn a living by selling pots and earthenware. You must sit in the market-place and sell the ware.”

“Alas,” thought she, “if any of the people from my father’s kingdom come to the market and see me sitting there, selling, how they will mock me!” But it was of no use, she had to yield unless she chose to die of hunger.

For the first time, she succeeded well, for the people were glad to buy the woman’s wares because she was good-looking, and they paid her what she asked. Many even gave her the money and left the pots with her as well. So they lived on what she had earned as long as it lasted.

Then the husband bought a lot of new crockery. With this she sat down at the corner of the market-place, and set it around her ready for sale. But suddenly there came a drunken soldier galloping along, and he rode right amongst the pots, so that they were all broken into a thousand bits.

She began to weep, and did not know what to do for fear. “Alas! what will happen to me?” cried she; “what will my husband say to this?” She ran home and told him of the misfortune.

“Who would seat herself at a corner of the market-place with crockery?” said the man. “Leave off crying. I see very well that you cannot do ordinary work, so I have been to our King’s palace and have asked whether they cannot find a place for a kitchen-maid. They have promised me to take you. In that way, you will get your food for nothing.”

The King’s Daughter was now a kitchen-maid, and had to be at the cook’s beck and call, and do the dirtiest work. In each of her pockets she fastened a little jar, in which she took home her share of the leavings, and upon this they lived.

It happened that the wedding of the King’s eldest son was to be celebrated. So the poor woman went up and placed herself by the door of the hall to look on. When all the candles were lit, and people, each more beautiful than the other, entered, and all was full of pomp and splendor, she thought of her lot with a sad heart, and cursed the pride and haughtiness which had humbled her, and brought her to so great poverty.

The smell of the delicious dishes which were being taken in and out reached her, and now and then the servants threw her a few morsels. These she put in her jars to take home.

All at once, the King’s Son entered, clothed in velvet and silk,

with gold chains about his neck. And when he saw the beautiful woman standing by the door he seized her by the hand, and would have danced with her. But she refused and shrank back with fear, for she saw that it was King Thrushbeard, her suitor whom she had driven away with scorn.

Her struggles were of no use; he drew her into the hall. But the string by which her pockets were fastened, broke, the pots fell down, the soup ran out, and the scraps were scattered all around. And when the people saw it, there arose laughter and derision, and she was so ashamed that she would rather have been a thousand fathoms below ground.

She sprang to the door and would have run away, but on the stairs a man caught her and brought her back. And when she looked at him it was King Thrushbeard!

He said to her kindly, "Do not be afraid, I and the fiddler who has been living with you in that wretched hovel are one. For love of you I disguised myself so. And I, also, was the soldier who rode through your crockery. This was all done to humble your proud spirit, and to punish you for the insolence with which you mocked me."

Then she wept bitterly and said, "I have done great wrong, and am not worthy to be your wife."

But he said, "Be comforted. The evil days are past. Now we will celebrate our wedding."

Then the maids-in-waiting came, and put the most splendid clothing on her. Her father and his whole Court arrived, and wished her happiness in her marriage to King Thrushbeard. And the joy now began in earnest. I wish you and I had been there too!



THE MANHATTADOR

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Love Conquers All*, by Robert C. Benchley

Announcements have been made of a bull-fight to be held in Madison Square Garden, New York, in which only the more humane features of the

Spanish institution are to be retained. The bull will not be killed, or even hurt, and horses will not be used as bait.

If a bull-fight must be held, this is of course the way to hold it, but what features are to be substituted for the playful gorings and stabbings of the Madrid system? Something must be done to enrage the bull, otherwise he will just sulk in a corner or walk out on the whole affair. Following is a suggestion for the program of events:

1. Grand parade around the ring, headed by a brass-band and the mayor in matador's costume. Invitations to march in this parade will be issued to every one in the bull-fighting set with the exception of the bull, who will be ignored. This will make him pretty sore to start with.
2. After the marchers have been seated, the bull will be led into the ring. An organized cheering section among the spectators will immediately start jeering him, whistling, and calling "Take off those horns, we know you!"
3. The picadors will now enter, bearing pikes with ticklers on the ends. These will be brushed across the bull's nose as the picadors rush past him on noisy motor-cycles. The noise of the motor-cycles is counted on to irritate the bull quite as much as the ticklers, as he will probably be trying to sleep at the time.
4. Enter the bandilleros, carrying various ornate articles of girls' clothing (daisy-hat with blue ribbons, pink sash, lace jabot, etc.) which will, one by one, be hung on the bull when he isn't looking. In order to accomplish this, one of the bandilleros will engage the animal in conversation while another sneaks up behind him with the frippery. When he is quite trimmed, the bandilleros will withdraw to behind a shelter and call him: "Lizzie!"
5. By this time, the bull will be almost crying he will be so sore. This is the moment for the entrance of the intrepid matador. The matador will wear an outing cap with a cutaway and Jaeger vest, and the animal will become so infuriated by this inexcusable *_mésalliance_* of garments that he will charge madly at his antagonist. The matador, who will be equipped with boxing-gloves, will feint with his left and pull the daisy-hat down over the bull's eyes with his right, immediately afterward stepping quickly to one side. The bull, blinded by the daisies, will not know where to go next and soon will laughingly admit that the joke has been on him. He will then allow the matador to jump on his back and ride around the ring, making good-natured attempts to unseat his rider.



A BOATING ADVENTURE IN THE CAROLINES

Project Gutenberg's *Ridan The Devil And Other Stories*, by Louis Becke

In the year 1874 we were cruising leisurely through the Western Carolines, in the North Pacific, trading at such islands as we touched at, and making for the Pelew Group, still farther to the westward. But at that season of the year the winds were very light, a strong ocean current set continuously to the eastward, and there was every indication of a solid calm setting in, and lasting, as they do in these latitudes, for a week. Now, part of our cargo consisted of dried sharks' fins, and the smell from these was so strong that every one of the three white men on board was suffering from severe headache. We had a number of native passengers, and, as they lived in the hold, we could not close the hatches; they, however, did not mind the nauseating odour in the least. So, for three or four days, we crawled along, raising the wooded peaks of Ascension Island (Ponapé) one afternoon, and drifting back to the east so much in the night as to lose them at sunrise. Then followed another day of a sky of brass above and a steaming wide expanse of oily sea below, and then, at nightfall, a sweet, cooling breeze from the north-east, and general happiness, accentuated by a native woman playing a dissolute-looking accordion, and singing 'Voici le Sabre,' in Tahitian French. No one cared to sleep that night. Dawn came almost ere we knew it, and again the blue peaks of Ascension loomed up right ahead.

Just as we had finished coffee, and our attention was drawn to a number of boobies and whale-birds resting upon some floating substance half a mile distant, we discovered a couple of sail ahead, and then another, and another, all whalers, and, as they were under easy-cruising canvas--being on the sperm whaling ground--we soon began to overhaul them. One was a small, full-rigged ship, the others were barques. As we slipped along after them I ran our little vessel close to the floating object I have before mentioned, and saw it was a ship's lower mast, which looked, from the scarcity of marine growth upon it, to have been in the water but a short time. Shortly after, we passed some more wreckage, all of which evidently had belonged to a good lump of the vessel.

About eleven o'clock we were close to one of the barques--a four-boat ship, and also carrying a nine-foot dinghy at her stern. She hoisted the Hawaiian colours in response to ours, and, as the breeze was very light,

I hailed her skipper and we began to talk. Our skipper wanted some pump-leather; he wanted some white sugar.

'Come aboard,' he said, 'and have dinner with me. I'll give you a barrel of 'Frisco potatoes to take back.'

We lowered our whale-boat, and, taking two hands, I pulled alongside the barque. Although under the Hawaiian flag, her officers were nearly all Americans, and, as is always the case in the South Seas, we were soon on friendly terms. The four ships were all making for Jakoits Harbour, in Ponapé, to wood and water; and I said we would keep company with them. Our own skipper, I must mention, was just recovering from wild, weird visions of impossible, imaginary animals, superinduced by Hollands gin, and I wanted to put him ashore at Ponapé for a week or so.

After dinner the American captain put a barrel of potatoes into our boat, and I bade him good-bye for the time. The breeze was now freshening, and, as he decided to get into Jakoits before dark, the barque made sail, and was soon a good distance ahead of our vessel.

Between four and five o'clock we saw the foremost whaler--the ship--brace up sharp, and almost immediately the other three followed suit. We soon discovered the cause--whales had been sighted, coming down from windward. The 'pod' or school was nearest to us, and we could see them quite plainly from the deck. Every now and then one of them would 'breach' and send up a white mass of foam, and by their course I saw that they would pass between us and the barque--the ship nearest to us. In less than five minutes there were more than a dozen boats lowered from the four vessels, all pulling their hardest to reach the whales first. The creatures came along very leisurely, then, when about a mile from the schooner, hove-to for a short time; their keen hearing told them of danger ahead, for three or four of them sounded, and then made off to windward. These were followed by all the boats from the other three vessels, and two from the barque, the remaining two belonging to the latter pulling across our bows, close together and within a hundred yards of us.

The rest of the whales--some cows, with their calves, and a bull--after lying quiet for a short time, also sounded, but soon rose again, quite close to the two boats. That of the chief mate got 'fast' first to one of the cows, and away they flew at twelve or thirteen knots. The second boat was making for the bull, which seemed very uneasy, and was swimming at a great speed round and round the remaining cows and calves, with his head high out of the water as if to guard them from danger, when the monstrous creature again sounded and the boat-header instantly turned his attention to a cow, which lay perfectly motionless on the water, apparently too terrified to move.

Half a dozen strokes sent the boat to within striking distance and the boat-header called to his boat-steerer to 'Stand up.' The boat-steerer,

who pulls bow oar before a whale is struck, and goes aft after striking, is also the harpooner, and at the order to stand up, takes in his oar and seizes his harpoon. After he has darted the iron, and the boat is backed astern, he comes aft to steer, and the officer takes his place for'ard, ready to lance the whale at the fitting time. There is no reason or sense in this procedure, it is merely whaling custom.

Just as the boat-steerer stood up, iron in hand, the bull rose right under the boat's stern, lifted her clean out of the water with his head, and then, as he swept onward, gave her an underclip with his mighty flukes, smashing her in like an egg-shell and sending men, oars, tub and lines, and broken timbers, broadcast into the air. Then, with the lady by his side, he raced away.

Most fortunately, our own boat was still towing astern, for as we were so near the land we had not bothered about hoisting her up again, knowing that we should want her to tow us into Jakoits if the wind fell light when going through the passage.

The mate, two Penrhyn Island natives and myself were but a few moments in hauling her alongside, jumping in, and pulling to the assistance of the whale-boat's crew, some of whom we could see clinging to the wreckage. The officer in charge was a little wiry Western Island Portuguese, and as we came up he called out to us that one of the men was killed and had sunk, and another, whom he was supporting, had his leg broken and was unconscious. We lifted them into the boat as quickly as possible, laid the injured man on his back and started for the schooner. We had scarcely pulled a dozen strokes when, to our profound astonishment, we saw her suddenly keep away from us.

'The captain's come on deck again,' cried one of our native hands to me.

Sure enough, the skipper was on deck, and at the wheel, and took not the slightest heed of our repeated hails, except that he merely turned his head, gave us a brief glance, eased off the main-sheet a bit, and let the schooner spin away towards the land. We learnt next evening that he had suddenly emerged on deck from his bunk, given the helmsman a cuff on the head, and driven him, the steward and the other remaining hand up for'ard. They and the native passengers, who knew something of his performances when in liquor, were too frightened to do anything, and let him have his own way.

We pulled after the schooner as hard as we could for a quarter of an hour, then gave it up and steered for the barque, which was now a couple of miles away. She had been working to windward after the chief mate's and fourth mate's boats--both of which had quickly killed their respective whales--when the disaster to the second officer's boat was seen, and she was now coming towards us. The fourth boat was miles distant, chasing the main body of the 'pod,' in company with those of the other barques and the ship.

By this time it was all but dark; a short, choppy sea had risen, the wind came in sharp, angry puffs every now and then, and we made scarcely any headway against it. The barque seemed to be almost standing still, though she was really coming along at a ripping pace. Presently she showed a light, and we felt relieved. Just then the man with the broken leg called to his officer, and asked for a smoke, and I was filling my pipe for him when the boat struck something hard with a crash, shipped a sea aft, and at once capsized, several of us being taken underneath her.

The Portuguese, who was a gallant little fellow, had, with one of the Penrhyn Islanders, got the wounded man clear, and presently we all found ourselves clinging to the boat, which was floating bottom-up and badly bilged. Fortunately, none of us were hurt, but our position was a dangerous one, and we kept hailing repeatedly, fearing that the barque would run by us in the darkness, and that the blue sharks would discover us. Then, to our joy, we saw her close to, bearing right down upon us, and now came the added terror that she would run us down, unless those on board could be made to hear our cries and realise our situation.

Again we raised our voices, and shouted till our lungs were exhausted, but no answer came, the only sounds we heard being the thrapping and swash of the waves against our boat. Five minutes--which seemed hours--passed, and then we suddenly lost sight of the barque's headlight, and saw the dull gleam of those aft shining through the cabin ports.

'Thank God!' said the whaler officer, 'he's bringing to.'

Scarcely had he spoken when we heard a hail distinctly.

'Boat ahoy, there, where are you?'

'In the water. We're capsized,' I answered.

No response came; then again they hailed, and again we shouted unitedly, but no reply, and presently we saw a blue light was being burnt on the starboard side--they were looking for us in the wrong quarter. For some minutes our suspense was horrible, for, if the captain thought he had overshot our boat (knowing nothing of the second disaster), he would, we feared, go off on the other tack. Again they hailed, and again we answered, though we were now feeling pretty well done up, and the Portuguese was alternately praying to the saints and consigning his captain to hell.

'Hurrah!' cried Tom, one of my Penrhyn Island boys, 'she's filling away again, and coming down; they've heard us, safe enough.'

It so happened that they had not heard us at all; but the captain, at the earnest request of the ship's cooper, who believed that we had been

swamped, and were to leeward, decided to keep away for a short time, and then again bring-to. Not only was he anxious for us, but for the other boats, and the dead whales as well; for he feared that, unless he could get the latter alongside by daylight, and start to cut-in, the sharks would devour the best part of them.

A few more minutes passed, and now we saw the barque looming through the night, and apparently again coming right on top of us. We shouted and screamed till our voices broke into hoarse groans; and then there happened a strange thing. That which had caused our misfortune proved our salvation. We heard a crashing sound, followed by loud cries of alarm, and then saw the ship lying flat aback, canting heavily over to port. Presently she righted, and then made a stern-board, and came so close to us that one of the hands not only heard our cries but saw us in the water.

In an instant the captain called to us to cheer up, and said a boat was coming. 'The ship struck some wreckage, and is making water,' he added.

We were taken aboard in two trips, the poor, broken-legged sailor suffering terribly. He had been kept from drowning by one of the Penrhyn men, who stuck to him like a brick through all the time we were in the water. Neither of these brave islanders had lost heart for a moment, though Harry, the elder of the two, was in consumption and not at all strong.

As soon as we had sufficiently recovered to be able to talk and tell our story, we were pleased to hear from the captain that the ship was not badly injured, and that the pumps--short-handed as he then was--could easily keep the water down; also that all the other boats were safe, and had signalled that they had each 'killed,' and were lying by their whales.

Early in the morning the four ships were within a few miles of each other, and each had one or more whales alongside, cutting-in. The schooner, too, was in sight, lying becalmed under the lee of Ponapé. The captain of the whaler lent me one of his boats, paid me a fair price for the loss of our own, and otherwise treated us handsomely. He was highly pleased at having such 'greasy luck,' i.e., getting three fish, and, besides presenting me with another barrel of potatoes, gave me four bolts of canvas, and each of our natives came away with a small case of tobacco, and five dollars in silver.

We had a long pull to the schooner, and our arrival was hailed with cries of delight. The skipper, we were pleased to learn, was nearly dead, having been severely beaten by the women passengers on board, one of whom, creeping up behind him as he was steering, threw a piece of _tappa_ cloth over his head, while the others bore him to the deck and tied him up and hammered him. He told me a few days afterwards that he had not the slightest recollection of leaving us in the boat.

The wreckage upon which the whale-ship struck was, so her captain imagined, the same which had capsized our boat. As far as he could make out in the darkness, it was a long and wide piece of decking, belonging to a large ship. Our boat, very probably, had gone half her length on top of the edge of it, and was then washed off again after she had bilged; and the strong current had set us clear.



THE PLAIN SISTER

BY Demetrios Bikelas

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I.

Mr. Plateas, professor of Greek in the Gymnasium of Syra, was returning from his regular afternoon walk.

He used to take this walk along the Vaporia, but since they had begun to build a carriage road to Chroussa--at the other end of the island--he bent his steps in that direction, instead of pacing four times up and down the only promenade in Syra. He followed the road-building with great interest, and went farther and farther from week to week. His learned colleagues said he would finally get to Chroussa,--when the road was finished; but at this time--that is, in 1850--the Conservative party in the town regarded the expense as useless and too heavy for the resources of the commune, and so the work had been stopped for some months.

The road was completed as far as the stony valley of Mana, and here the professor's daily walk ended. To look at him nobody would have suspected that he had to care for his health; but his growing stoutness gave him no little anxiety, and led him to take this exercise. Perhaps his short stature made him look stouter than he really was; yet it could not be denied that his neck emerged with difficulty from the folds of his neck-cloth, or that his close-shaven, brick-red cheeks stood out rather too conspicuously on each side of his thick moustache. The professor had passed his fortieth year. True, he still preserved his elasticity, and his short legs carried their burden easily; but it was noticed that when he had a companion on his walks, he always

contrived to have his interlocutor do the talking going up hill, and took his own turn coming down or on the level ground.

If he had thus far failed to lessen his rotundity, he had at least stopped its growth,--a fact of which he made sure once a month by weighing himself on the scales of the Custom House, where a friend of his held the post of weigher. His physician had also recommended sea-bathing. Most of his friends--both doctors and laymen--protested against this advice; but the professor was immovable when once he had made up his mind or bestowed his confidence; he stood firm against the remonstrance and banter of those who regarded sea-bathing as a tonic, and consequently fattening. He continued his baths for two seasons, and would have kept on for the rest of his life, if a dreadful accident had not given him such a fear of the sea, that he would have risked doubling his circumference rather than expose himself again to the danger from which he had been saved only through the strength and courage of Mr. Liakos, a judge of the civil court. But for him, Mr. Plateas would have been drowned, and this history unwritten.

It happened in this wise.

The professor was not an expert swimmer, but he could keep above water, and was particularly fond of floating. One summer day as he lay on the surface of the tepid sea quite unconcernedly, the sense of comfort led to a slight somnolence. All at once he felt the water heaving under him as if suddenly parted by some heavy body, and then seething against his person. In an instant he thought of a shark, and turned quickly to swim away from the monster; but whether from hurry, fright, or his own weight, he lost his balance and sank heavily. While all this happened quick as a flash, the moments seemed like centuries to him, and his imagination, excited by the sudden rush of blood to the head, worked so swiftly, that, as the professor said afterwards, if he should try to set down everything that came into his mind then, it would make a good-sized book. Scenes of his childhood, incidents of his youth, the faces of his favorite pupils since the beginning of his career as a teacher, the death of his mother, the breakfast he had eaten that morning,--all passed before him in quick succession, and mingled together without becoming confused; while as a musical accompaniment, there kept sounding in his ears the verse of Valaoritis in "The Bell":

"Ding-dong! The bell!"

The night before poor Mr. Plateas had been reading "The Bell" of the poet of Leucadia,--that pathetic picture of the enamored young sailor, who, on returning to his village, throws himself into the sea to reach more speedily the shore, where he hears the tolling knell and sees the funeral procession of his beloved, and as he buffets the waves is devoured by the monster of the deep. The poetical description of this catastrophe had so affected him that he afterwards attributed his misadventure to the influence of the poet's verses. If he had not read

"The Bell" that night, he would not have mistaken for a shark the urchin that swam under him, for it was not the first time that mischievous boys had amused themselves by plunging under the professor's broad shoulders; but he had never been frightened before, while to-day this poetic recollection nearly cost him his life.

Fortunately Mr. Liakos was taking his bath near by, and when he saw the professor disappear in that extraordinary fashion, and the circles widening on the surface, he at once understood what had happened. Swimming rapidly to the spot, he dived down, managed to grasp the drowning man, dragged him to the surface, and brought him ashore unconscious. Thanks to these prompt measures, Mr. Plateas came to himself,--with great difficulty, it is true, but he finally did come to himself; and there on the shore of the sea he made a double vow: never again to go into the water, and never to forget that he owed his life to Mr. Liakos.

This vow he kept faithfully. Indeed, so far as his preserver was concerned, it was kept with such exaggeration, that while the judge did not repent saving the professor's life, he often found himself regretting that some one else had not been at hand to earn all this embarrassing gratitude. Everywhere Mr. Plateas boasted of the merits of his preserver; the whole island resounded with his praise; each time they met,--and they met several times a day,--he rushed toward the judge enthusiastically and lost no chance to proclaim that henceforth his only desire was to prove his words by his deeds. "My life belongs to you," he would say; "I have consecrated it to you."

In vain the judge protested, and urged that the matter was not so serious,--that any one else would have done the same in his place. Mr. Plateas would not be convinced, and persisted in declaring his gratitude. While it often rather bored him, the judge was touched by this devotion, and came to accept the professor as a part of his daily life; in this way the two men gradually became fast friends, although they were unlike in almost everything.

So Mr. Plateas was returning from his constitutional. It was one of those beautiful February days, true forerunners of spring, when the sun kisses the first leaves of the early almonds, the blue sea sparkles, and the cloudless sky of Greece smiles. But it was nearly sunset, and the prudent professor hardly dared expose himself to the cool evening air, for at this season winter reasserts itself as soon as the sun goes down. He had almost reached the dockyard, which then marked the outskirts of Syra, and was still walking along the shore, when he saw his well-beloved Liakos in the distance coming from the town. A smile of satisfaction lighted his round face; he threw up both hands, in one of which was a stout cane, and raising his voice so as to be heard by his friend from afar, declaimed this line from the "Iliad":

[Greek text] Who mayest thou be, of mortal men most brave?

The professor had a habit of quoting Homer on all occasions, and was reputed to know the whole "Iliad" and "Odyssey" by heart. He modestly disavowed this tribute to his learning, but without giving up the quotations that seemed to justify it. It is true ill-natured people said his verses were not always quite applicable; but the Hellenists of Syra did not confirm this slander, possibly because they were not competent to judge. Still, everybody used to smile when he raised his voice in the midst of a trivial conversation to roll forth majestically some sonorous hexameter from Homer.

When the two friends were near enough, Mr. Plateas stopped and effusively shook hands with his preserver.

"My dear friend, why didn't you tell me you were going to walk to-day? We could have come out together,--it's time to go in now. Why did you start so late?"

"Yes, I am late; I expected to meet you farther on." And Mr. Liakos added with a show of indifference, "Are there many people out to-day?"

"Very few. You know our Syrans; they're content to saunter up and down their crowded square; it is only people of taste who enjoy themselves--

[Greek Text] ... on the shore of the resounding sea."

"And who were these men of taste to-day?" asked the judge, with a smile.

"If I had spoken of MEN of taste, I should have had to confine myself to the dual number!" Mr. Plateas began to laugh at his own joke. His friend smiled too, but wishing a more exact answer, continued:

"At least we two have imitators; how many did you meet and who were they?"

"Always the same; Mr. A., Mr. B.--" And the professor began to count off on his fingers the peripatetic philosophers, as he used to call the frequenters of this promenade, that he had met,--all of them old, or at least of ripe age, except one romantic youth who thought himself a poet.

"And no ladies?" asked the judge.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. X. with her flock of children, and the merchant,--what is his name,--Mr. Mitrophanis, with his two daughters."

The judge had learned all he wanted to know without letting his friend perceive the drift of his questions. This was not very difficult, for the professor was by no means a modern Lynceus, and did not see any great distance beyond his nose. No doubt this resulted from the innate simplicity and integrity of his character; having never been able to

conceal or feign anything himself, he was easily led to believe whatever he was told. The readiness with which he became the victim of his friends each first of April was notorious. He was always on the watch from the night before; but his precautions were in vain. He was a man of first impressions. Sometimes, but not often, he fathomed the questions afterward, and discovered that he had not acted or spoken as he would have liked. As a rule, however, these after-thoughts came too late to be of any use, and he had to console himself with the reflection that what's done is done.

"What do you say, will you stroll on with me?" asked the judge.

"What, at this hour, my dear friend!"

"Only to the turn of the road."

"You had better come home with me, and I'll treat you to some perfumed wine that I received yesterday from Siphnos. I can recommend it."

"Well, since you are so kind, I shall be very glad to taste your native wine; but first let us sit here awhile and breathe the fresh sea-air." And he pointed to a modest cafe, "On the Sands," which a bold speculator had improvized only a few weeks before, by making a small inclosure of planks and setting up a few tables.

The professor turned toward the cafe, then looked at the setting sun, took out his watch, glanced at the hour, and heaved a gentle sigh.

"You do whatever you please with me," he said, as he followed Mr. Liakos.

II.

The two friends bent their steps toward the empty cafe, to the great delight of the proprietor, who ran forward zealously to offer his services. The judge contrived to place the seats so that he could see the road that led to Mana. The professor sat down opposite, facing the town, with his back to the country; but he seemed rather nervous about the evening air, for he shivered every now and then, and took care to button up his overcoat to the very neck.

They began by talking about their daily affairs; Mr. Liakos suggested the topics, while the professor held forth to his heart's content, and fairly revelled in Homeric quotation. He noticed, however, that his companion, instead of heeding what he said, kept looking toward the highway, and leaning forward to see still further around the bend in the road. Following his friend's gaze, Mr. Plateas also turned now and then; he even turned squarely around and peered through his glasses to

find out what the judge was looking at; but seeing nothing he sat down again erect upon his stool, and went on with the conversation.

At last Mr. Liakos espied what he was looking for. His eyes shone; the expression of his whole face changed, and he made no further pretence of listening to his friend's story about a recent controversy between two learned professors in the University of Athens. Seeing the judge's eyes fixed upon some object behind, Mr. Plateas stopped short, leaned his fat hand on the table to aid the gyration that he was about to make upon his stool, and was preparing for another effort to discover what could thus fascinate Mr. Liakos, when the judge, divining his companion's purpose, suddenly laid his hand on the professor's, and pressing it firmly, said in a low voice, but with a tone of authority:

"Don't turn around!"

Mr. Plateas sat motionless, with mouth open and eyes fastened on those of his friend, who was still staring at the road. The judge's look showed that the object of his interest was coming nearer, but the professor did not dare to stir or utter a word.

"Talk," whispered Mr. Liakos. "Continue the conversation."

"But, my dear friend, what shall I say? You've driven every idea out of my head."

"Recite something."

"What shall I recite?"

"Anything you like,--something out of the 'Iliad.'"

"But I can't think of a single line!"

"Say the Creed, then,--anything you please, only don't sit there dumb."

The poor professor began to stammer out mechanically the first words of the Creed; but either from a sense of impiety or from mere confusion of mind, he passed abruptly to the first book of the "Iliad." His memory played him false. How his pupils would have suffered if they had thus maltreated the immortal bard!

He was still reciting when the judge released his hand and got up to make an elaborate bow. Mr. Plateas looked in the same direction, and saw the back of an elderly gentleman between two attractive young girls. He had no difficulty in recognizing the trio, even from the rear.

Mr. Liakos sat down again, blushing furiously while the professor in utter stupefaction made the sign of the cross.

"Kyrie Eleison!" said he. "Then all this ado was for Mr. Mitrophanis and his daughters?"

"I beg your pardon," replied the judge, in a voice that betrayed his agitation. "I did not want them to think that we were talking about them."

"Bless my soul! You don't mean to say you're in love?"

"Ah, yes. I love her with all my heart!" Mr. Liakos turned once more, and his eyes followed one of the two girls.

The professor had listened with some uneasiness. While touched by the judge's emotion, he was at the same time perhaps a little jealous of its cause; he was surprised that his friend had never spoken of this love, and vexed with himself that he had not divined it. But all these ideas were so hazy that he could hardly have expressed them.

After a few moments' silence, and while the judge's passionate avowal still lingered in his ears, he asked naively, and without stopping to think:

"Which one?"

Mr. Liakos looked at the professor in astonishment, and although he did not speak, the expression of his face said plainly, "Can you ask?"

Mr. Plateas clapped his hand to his forehead.

"Where were my wits!" he cried. "Excuse me, my dear friend; but seeing only their backs, as I did a moment ago, I couldn't tell one from the other; and I had forgotten that the elder sister's face would scarcely inspire love. But the younger--SHE is charming!"

The judge listened without reply.

"Do you know," the professor went on, at last unburdening his mind, "I don't understand how you could be in love, and not tell me about it; how you could hide your feelings from your friend! If it had been I, you wouldn't have been spared a single sigh!" And his chest gave forth an "Ah" which he tried to render amorous. This sigh, or perhaps the mere idea of the professor in love, brought a smile to the judge's clouded face.

"Why haven't you ever spoken to me about it?" continued Mr. Plateas.

"Because I did not wish to bore you," replied Mr. Liakos. Then, touched by his friend's reproachful look, he made haste to add, "But now I will tell you everything, since you desire it."

Still he was silent, as if he hardly knew how to begin. The professor shivered again, and seeing that the sun had gone down behind the mountains, said:

"Hadn't we better talk about this on the way home, or at my house? It's time to go in."

The two men rose, and started toward the city.

What desponding lover has not yearned to pour out his heart to some friend? Even reverence for the purity of his feeling will not restrain him. He tries to guard the mystery of his love as in a holy sanctuary; he would not expose it to unrevering eyes; he hesitates, he delays,--but sooner or later his heart will overflow, and he must have a confidant.

The judge had already chosen his confidant, and so was in no hurry to take advantage of the opportunity that now offered; he was still silent, and began to regret his thoughtless promise to tell his friend everything. While he had an esteem and even a warm affection for Mr. Plateas, he could not regard the professor as a fitting recipient for a love-confidence, or quite able to appreciate the delicacy of his feeling; and, besides, it seemed to him almost treason to reveal again the secret he had already confided to another.

Mr. Plateas noticed his friend's hesitancy, but ascribed it to agitation. After a pause he saw that the confession was not coming of itself, and tried to draw it out by asking questions. Although frank, the answers he received were brief; still, he was able to gather that the judge had been in love ever since coming to Syra,--three years before,--and had then vowed either to marry Mr. Mitrophanis's younger daughter, or never to marry at all. It was only within the last few months, however, that Mr. Liakos had met the young girl for the first time, at a friend's house, and had discovered that his love was returned.

"Where did this happen?"

"At my cousin's."

"Does she know the two girls?"

"Oh, yes; she was a friend of their mother's."

"Ah! Now I understand," cried the professor. "Your cousin received your sighs. She has been your confidante! That's why you never said anything to me."

The judge smiled, but his poor friend felt a little jealous of this cousin.

"Why didn't you propose for her hand just as soon as you knew she liked you?" the professor continued.

"I did, a week ago; I requested my cousin to call on Mr. Mitrophanis, but--"

"But what? Where could he find a better son-in-law? He didn't refuse you, surely?"

"No, he did not refuse, but he made a condition that can be fulfilled--Heaven knows when! In the meanwhile he does not wish us to meet. I had not seen her for ten days, even at a distance, and you can understand with what emotion just now I--"

"What is this condition?" asked the professor.

"To wait until the elder sister is married. He won't allow the younger to marry, or even to be betrothed, before the elder."

"Ah, my friend, that's a pity! I fear you'll have to wait a long, long time. It won't be so easy to marry off the sister. Still, all things are possible,--you mustn't despair."

The judge was silent, evidently a prey to melancholy. After a little he said:

"And yet that sister is a perfect treasure, in spite of her lack of beauty. There isn't a sweeter soul on earth; she has entreated her father to change his decision; she assures him that she has no wish to marry, and that her only desire is to remain with him to care for his old age, and to help rear her sister's children. But the old man is inflexible; when once he takes a stand, that's the end of it!"

The judge's tongue was untied, and he was as eloquent in praise of the elder sister as he had been reserved in telling of his love. Perhaps this eased his mind, for to speak of her seemed almost like speaking of his sweetheart; to commend the one was to exalt the other.

"She is an angel of goodness," he continued, "and loves her sister with all a mother's tenderness; indeed, she has filled a mother's place ever since the two girls were left orphans. She has the whole care of the house, and manages it admirably; my cousin never tires of telling me that she has nowhere seen such good order, or a house so well kept. But you must not imagine that she neglects other things for the sake of her housekeeping. Few of our women are so well read or so widely informed. In that respect, at least, Mr. Mitrophanis is worthy of all praise; his daughters have been carefully educated. It is hardly his fault if the two are not equally fair to look upon; in beauty of character they are equal. The elder also is a treasure, and happy the man that wins her."

At first the professor listened in some astonishment to his friend's sudden enthusiasm; then, little by little, his surprise changed to uneasiness. He began to suspect that--But he was not the man to conceal anything that came into his mind, and stopping abruptly in the middle of the road, he interrupted the judge's eulogy.

"But why do you tell me all this?" he asked. "Why do you sing her praises to me? What do you mean--are you trying to inveigle me into marrying her?"

Mr. Liakos was astounded. The idea had never occurred to him; he had never thought of the professor as a marrying man. And yet, why not? In what was he lacking? Wasn't his friend the very man to become the brother-in-law he so ardently desired? All this passed vaguely through his mind while he stood staring at Mr. Plateas, unable to find an answer to this unexpected question. The professor continued with energy:

"Listen, Liakos. I owe you my life; it belongs to you. But if you ask me to get married as a proof of my gratitude, I'd far rather go this moment back to the sea, where you saved me from death, and drown myself before your very eyes!"

The sudden heat of the professor's speech showed that he was hurt, but whether at what the judge had just been saying about the elder sister, or at the secrecy he had shown in the matter and his studied reserve in speaking of the younger sister, was doubtful. Probably the good man himself did not know; what he did know was that he felt hurt. This was clear enough from what he said and the way he said it.

Mr. Liakos was offended.

"Mr. Plateas," he replied dryly, "I have often told you--and I repeat it now for the last time, I hope--I have not, and I do not wish to have, any claim upon your gratitude. As for your marrying, I assure you that I never dreamed of presenting you as a suitor, or of seeking a wife for you. I had not the least thought of it when I spoke to you of my affairs, and I now regret having troubled you with them."

The two friends walked on in silence side by side, but were impatient to part as soon as they could decorously. When they had nearly reached the place where their homeward paths would separate, the professor repeated his invitation.

"Won't you come and taste my muscat?"

"No, thank you; it is late, and I have an engagement."

"With your cousin, perhaps?"

"Perhaps!" and the judge tried to smile.

"I hope you're not vexed with me," said his friend, in a conciliatory tone.

"Why should I be?"

"Perhaps what I said was uncalled for,--particularly as you never meant to interfere with my liberty." The good man began to laugh, and then added: "But it's much better to have such things cleared up."

"Certainly, quite so."

The judge shook the fat hand that was cordially offered him, and hurried on, while his companion went slowly home.

III.

The professor's house was on the hillside in the quarter where the Orphan Asylum now stands. At that time there were very few dwellings in the neighborhood, which was rather far from the centre of the town, and the outlook was wide and varied. It was not the view, however, that had attracted the professor, but the cheapness of the land. He had built the house himself, and its walls were the fruit of many years of toil. Small and modest as it was, it was his own; he was in debt to no man, and had no rent to pay. This sweet feeling of independence quite made up for the tiring climb that the corpulent little owner had to take twice a day up the steep "River," as the street was called. The road bore this name (as everybody knows who has visited Syra), because it had been the bed of a stream that used to carry the winter rains from the mountain to the sea. In fact, the water runs down the street to this day, and in the wet season it becomes a raging torrent. Although the rocks and stones that once lined its sides have given place to houses, with their doors raised high above the flood, the origin of the street and the reason for its name are obvious enough even now.

Fortunately, rains are rare in Syra, but when they do fall, the "River" is often impassable; at such times the professor could reach his house only by zigzags through the side streets, and there were days when all communication was cut off, and he had to stay shut up at home.

The greatest pleasure that the house had brought him was that it had enabled him to give his old mother the happiness of passing her last days in comfort under her own roof, after the long privations and trials through which she had reared her son and had seen him overcome the difficulties of his professorial career. She had died peacefully in this house, and although a year had passed, her room remained as she had left it. The professor really needed it for his library, which grew

from day to day, but he preferred to leave the room unused, as sacred to his mother's memory.

The only heritage that she left him was her old servant, the taciturn Florou, whose senile caprices he endured patiently, bearing with her uncertain service and poor cooking. Florou's rule, however, rose no higher than the ground-floor. Her master found peace and quiet in his own room upstairs. Here he worked; at his table before the window he prepared his lessons, and read his favorite authors. Here, with pen in hand and his books spread out before him, he liked to look dreamily over the roofs of the other houses at the sea and the hazy outline of the neighboring islands, or to lean back with closed eyelids and look--at nothing, for he was asleep.

The professor was very fond of his house. Since he had owned it, he went out but little except to attend to his classes or take his regular walk, and it was always with a new pleasure that he looked upon his walls and opened his door again.

This evening he came home with even greater contentment than usual, as to a haven of refuge from the fancied dangers that lurked in his friend's eulogy of the plain sister.

"That would be the finishing stroke!" he said aloud, as he carefully folded his coat, put on an old dressing-gown, and tied a silk handkerchief around his head in the shape of a cap, as was his custom every evening.

"That would be the finishing stroke indeed! To bring a wife here to turn everything upside down; to take me out when I want to stay in, or keep me in when I want to go out; to talk to me when I want quiet; to open the window when I am chilly, because she is too warm; or to close it when I am warm, because she is too cold!" and with that he shut the window.

"Marriage may be all very well for the young; but when a man has reached years of discretion, such folly is not to be thought of. I have escaped the fetters so far, and I am not going to throw away my liberty at this late day!

[Greek text] Craftily they contrived against my freedom,"

He remembered the woman who had been chosen for him in his youth, as he had seen her the year before while on a visit to his native island,--with her gray hair and premature wrinkles,--surrounded by a troop of children, playing, quarrelling, and crying.

"Thank Heaven," he said aloud, "I haven't that load to carry! I wish the man joy that fills my place!"

Florou interrupted him by opening the door. She looked about the room in astonishment, but seeing that her master was only talking to himself, she shook her head and said curtly:

"Supper!"

"Very well, I'm coming;" and he went down to the parlor, which was next to the kitchen and served as dining-room also. The professor sat down with a good appetite, and when his hunger was appeased, he began to think over the incidents of his walk. At first his mind dwelt upon the advantages of bachelorhood; then he thought of Mr. Liakos, and felt a sincere pity for his friend.

"Poor fellow!" he said to himself. "He has been hit by Cupid's arrow, and is no longer his own master. He thinks he's on the right road to happiness; I hope he may find it, and never discover his mistake! Well, we never get just what we want in this world, and a man's happiness depends after all on his own way of feeling and thinking."

Mr. Plateas fancied this was philosophy, but, in fact, it was only a blind attempt to get rid of disagreeable thoughts. He could not forget the judge's evident dejection and vain effort to hide it. What if Mr. Liakos did want him to marry the plain sister! Perhaps his friend had felt a delicacy about speaking to him on the subject, and had denied ever having thought of such a thing only when stung by his ungrateful words.

Who had a better right to claim such a sacrifice? Did he not owe his very life to the judge? And how had he repaid this debt? He had tried to escape it! He had ignored his friend's delicacy, and basely threatened to drown himself rather than lift a hand to secure his preserver's happiness. The more he thought of it, the blacker seemed his ingratitude. He had actually insulted the man who had saved his life! The blood rushed to his cheeks; his remorse grew keener and keener, and his philosophy was of little comfort. Having eaten his last bunch of raisins, he pushed away his plate angrily, threw his napkin on the table, and went up to his room in a very discontented frame of mind.

"I've behaved abominably," he said to himself. "Why should I have offended him? There was no need of saying what I did. Reflection always comes too late with me!"

And striking his head with his hand, he paced up and down his room in the growing darkness until Florou came in and put his lamp on the table.

She came and went without a word.

The professor stopped a moment, and his eyes rested on the light. The light reminded him of his duty and invited him to work; he must prepare his lesson for the morrow. For the first time in his life he found that

he could not fix his mind upon his books. He hesitated, and then began to walk up and down again, thinking of Mr. Liakos, of his pupils, of the merchant's two daughters, and of the gymnasiarch, [Footnote: Superintendent of a gymnasium or secondary school.] all at the same time. Finally, in this jumble of ideas, professional instinct got the upper hand. He sat down at the table, put the three heavy volumes of Gazis's Dictionary, the Syntax of Asopios, and his other handbooks of study in their usual order, then set out his ink and paper, and found in his "Iliad" the page marked for the next day. He began his work by noting the etymology of each word, the syntax of every phrase, and the peculiarities of each hexameter. His class had reached the sixth book of the "Iliad."

Soon, however, he forgot syntax, etymology, and metre; he forgot his pupils and the dry analysis he was making for their benefit, and he read through the passage before him without stopping. It was the parting of Hector and Andromache. He discovered new beauty and meaning in the story; the exquisite picture of conjugal and paternal love, the happiness of mutual affection, the grief of parting, had never made such an impression upon him before. Never before had he read or recited the "Iliad" in this way, for as he read, Mr. Liakos gradually took Hector's place. He kept thinking of his friend; it was his friend who felt the bitterness of separation, and that too without ever having tasted, like Hector, the joys of conjugal happiness!

Mr. Plateas shut his book and started up again. A thousand conflicting thoughts filled his mind as he paced from his table to his bed, and from his bed back to his table.

"Pshaw!" he cried. "Why shouldn't I believe that Liakos never had any thought of marrying me off? I was a fool to imagine such a thing! Do I look like a marrying man?"

He stopped before his glass, which was lighted by the lamp only at one side, and saw one half of his face reflected with the silk handkerchief wound around his head, while the other half was in shadow, and the two ends of the knot stuck up over his forehead.

"Truly," he laughed, "between us we should have a beautiful Astyanax!"

He sat down again, calmer; but once more there began to throng before his eyes scenes and images that had nothing to do with the next day's lesson. He saw that he could not work in earnest, and decided to go to bed, thinking that rest would quiet his nerves, and that he could get up early in the morning and prepare his task with a fresher mind. So he went to bed and put out his lamp. But sleep would not come; he tossed about restlessly, and in the silence and darkness the very tension of his nerves made him more and more remorseful.

The long hours of the night passed slowly. At last, toward morning, he

fell asleep; but his waking thoughts were distorted into a frightful nightmare, and he started up in terror. He had dreamt that his bed was the sea, while his pillow was a shark, and his head was in the jaws of the monster. Then the shark began to wear the face and shape of the merchant's elder daughter, and a voice--the voice of Liakos--sounded in his ear, repeating over and over:

"Ding, Dong! Ungrateful wretch! Ding, Dong! Ungrateful wretch!"

He sat up in bed, and as he wiped his dripping forehead with the silk handkerchief, which had come untied in the agony of his dream, he made an heroic resolution.

"I will marry her!" he cried. "I owe so much to my preserver. I must do my duty and ease my conscience."

He covered himself up again, with a lighter heart; his mind was now tranquil, and free from all suspicion, hesitation, or remorse.

The morning sunlight flooded his room and woke him a full hour later than usual. It was the first time this had ever happened to the punctual professor, and Florou was positively dazed. With heavy head and aching eyes, he dressed hastily, swallowed his cup of black coffee, and sat down to the unfinished task of the night before. But his thoughts still wandered.

Nevertheless, he was at the gymnasium in time, and began the daily lesson. But what a lesson! At first the scholars wondered what had become of their teacher's wonted severity; they soon perceived that this remarkable forbearance was not due to any merit on their part, but to complete heedlessness on his. Wonder of wonders! Mr. Plateas was inattentive! Emboldened by this discovery, they took malicious delight in heaping blunder upon blunder, and played dire havoc with that sixth book of the "Iliad," never sparing etymology, syntax, nor prosody. The good man sat through it all undisturbed until the regular closing hour had struck. His pupils went out, commenting not on Homer, but on the unheard-of lenity of their master, while as he walked away he resumed the burden of his thoughts,--how to set about putting his resolve into execution.

The affair was not so simple as it had seemed to him in the night. His decision to marry the elder daughter of Mr. Mitrophanis was not enough; there were certain steps to take, but what were they? Should he apply to his friend? After what had passed between them the day before, he hardly liked to go to the judge and say--what? "I am ready for the sacrifice!" Certainly he couldn't do that. Should he ask the aid of Mr. Liakos's cousin? There were objections to this course, too; to be sure, he knew the lady, and her husband as well; he was in the habit of bowing to them on the street, but he had never had any conversation with the cousin, and felt that he had neither the right nor the courage

to ask her to serve as intermediary.

He thought it all over without reaching any conclusion, and was crossing the square on his way home,--for it was nearly time for his noon-day dinner,--when suddenly he saw Mr. Mitrophanis coming toward him. This meeting put an end to all his doubts, and with a flash of inspiration he decided to speak directly to the young lady's father. What could be simpler? Having no time to weigh the matter carefully, he was only too glad to find this happy way out of his perplexity. He bowed, and stopped before the old gentleman.

"Mr. Mitrophanis, I am delighted to meet you, for I have a few words to say."

"Mr. Plateas, I believe?" said the other, politely returning the bow.

"The same."

"And what can I do for you, Mr. Plateas?"

The professor began to feel a little embarrassed; but it was too late to turn back, so he took courage and went on:

"To come to the point at once, Mr. Mitrophanis, I desire to become your son-in-law!"

This abrupt proposal was a surprise to the old gentleman, and hardly an agreeable one. The offer itself was not so astonishing, for the beauty of his younger daughter had often obliged the father to refuse proposals of this kind; but he had never been addressed quite so brusquely before. Moreover, of all the suitors who had thus far presented themselves, Mr. Plateas seemed the least eligible in point of age and other respects. But it was not this so much that the old gentleman had in mind, as he said to himself, "What, he too!"

"I am greatly honored by your proposal," he said to Mr. Plateas; "but my little girl is too young, and I have not thought of marriage for her yet."

"What little girl? My suit is not for the younger sister; I ask you for the hand of Miss--" He meant to call her by her name, but found he did not know it. "I ask you for the hand of--your elder daughter."

Mr. Mitrophanis could not conceal his astonishment at these words; such a thing had never happened before. He said nothing, but looked sharply at Mr. Plateas, who felt his patience giving way.

"I must admit, Mr. Plateas," said the old gentleman at last, "that your proposition is wholly unexpected, and comes in rather an unusual form. Don't you think that our traditional custom in such cases is very

sensible, and that these questions are managed better by intermediaries?"

The professor was not prepared for this. He had even imagined that the young lady's father would fall on his neck in the open street, with delight at having at last found the wished-for son-in-law.

"I-I thought," he stammered, "that you knew me well enough, and that the simplest way was to speak to you myself."

"Certainly, without doubt. But if you would send one of your friends to speak to me, and--give me time for reflection, you would oblige me greatly."

"With pleasure! I'll send Mr. Liakos."

At this name the old man frowned.

"Ah!" said he, "Mr. Liakos is in your confidence."

Poor Mr. Plateas saw that he had made a mistake in bringing up his friend's name in the affair. He was about to say something,--he didn't know exactly what,--when Mr. Mitrophanis forestalled him, and ended his embarrassment.

"It is well. I will await Mr. Liakos." Then the old gentleman bowed and walked on.

Never in his life had the professor been in such a state of mental distress as that to which he had been a prey ever since the evening before. His sufferings at the time he came so near drowning were not to be compared with his present anguish. Then the danger had come suddenly, and he had realized it to the full only when it was over. Now, the uncertainty of the future added to his misery. At the very moment when he thought he had reached port, he found himself completely at sea again. He stood there in the middle of the square, his arms hanging helplessly, and stared at the back of the retreating merchant.

"Well, I must see Liakos," he said to himself. "But where shall I find him at this time of day?"

Just then the clock on the Church of the Transfiguration struck twelve. Mr. Plateas remembered, first that his dinner was waiting for him at home, and next that his friend was in the habit of dining at a certain restaurant behind the square; and wending his way there, he met the judge at the door.

"Oh, my dear friend!" he exclaimed. "My dear friend!"

"What's the matter? What has happened to you?" asked Mr. Liakos,

anxiously.

"What has happened to me? Something I never dreamed of! I've just asked Mr. Mitrophanis for the hand of his elder daughter, and instead of---"

"You asked him for his daughter's hand?"

"Yes. Is there anything so very astonishing in that?"

"Why, didn't you tell me yesterday that---"

"Well, what if I did? During the night I thought it over, and became convinced that I ought to get married, and that I never shall find a better wife."

"Listen, Plateas," said Mr. Liakos, obviously much moved. "I understand your sudden conversion, because I understand you; but I can't let you make such a sacrifice."

"What sacrifice? Who said anything about sacrifice? I have made up my mind to get married, because I want to get married; and I WILL get married, and if her father refuses his consent I'll run away with her!" And he gave a lively account of his meeting with Mr. Mitrophanis.

The judge smiled as he listened, for he, too, had been thinking of this match ever since the night before, and the more he thought of it the more eminently fit and proper it seemed. After rigid self-examination, he persuaded himself that he was quite disinterested in the matter, and that his sweetheart's sister and his friend could never be happy apart. As for the father's consent, he had little fear on that score. He rather dreaded, it is true, the mission that was thrust upon him, especially when he thought of the manner in which the old man had received his name; but he felt that he could not refuse this service to his friend, and finally promised to see Mr. Mitrophanis that very day, and to come in the evening to report the happy result of his interview.

IV.

When the professor had gone, the judge began to think with misgiving of the difficulties that beset his mission. He had so much at stake in its success that his mediation might not be accepted as impartial, or his praise of the suitor as quite unbiased. His friend's cause ought to have been entrusted to some one less deeply interested in the event. If the professor had not been in such haste to name him as an intermediary, they could have consulted his cousin, and even placed the matter in her hands; his own appearance on the scene would only give Mr. Mitrophanis fresh offence.

But why not ask her advice in confidence? She was a woman of sense and experience, and could probably find some way out of their quandary. Mr. Liakos was on the point of going to his cousin, but he reflected that it would be a grave indiscretion to impart the secret to a third person without his friend's consent, and he felt too that it would be very weak in him not to perform loyally the duty that he had undertaken. Forward, then! Courage!

So Mr. Liakos started for the office of his sweetheart's father, although not without inward trepidation.

It so happened that Mr. Mitrophanis was just receiving a consignment of coffee from the Custom House; carts were coming up one after another, porters were carrying the sacks into the warehouse, and the judge had difficulty in making his way to the door.

It was a huge square building, with a room on the street partitioned off at one corner. This room was the office, and had a grated window; but the light from it and from the street door was too dim for Mr. Liakos to see what was going on inside the warehouse. As he stood there on the threshold, he saw that his arrival was ill-timed; for there was a dispute in progress. Although he did not understand, or even try to understand what it was all about, he heard hot words bandied back and forth, and above them he could distinguish the merchant's voice, loud and masterful.

The judge stopped in surprise. He had heard of the old gentleman's temper, but had not imagined that anger could raise to such a pitch a voice usually so calm and dignified. He was alarmed and was trying to slip away unseen, when Mr. Mitrophanis interrupted the discussion and called out to him from the depths of the warehouse:

"What do you wish, Mr. Liakos?"

"I came to say a few words; but I see you're engaged, and will come again some other time."

"Pass into my office, and I will be with you in a moment."

The judge stumbled over some coffee bags, and, making his way into the office, sat down by the merchant's table in the only chair that was vacant. The air was heavy with the odor of colonial merchandise. The dispute began anew inside the warehouse, and the words, "weight," "bags," "Custom House," were repeated over and over again. Mr. Liakos sat listening to the noise, and tried to picture to himself the quiet old gentleman who had been out walking with his two daughters the night before. At last the commotion quieted down, and Mr. Mitrophanis came in with a frown on his face.

"I have happened on an unlucky time for my call," thought the judge.

"I suppose you come from Mr. Plateas," began the old man, with a touch of irony in his tone.

"Yes; the fact is he has communicated to me the conversation he had with you this morning."

"I must say, Mr. Liakos, that your anxiety to find a husband for my elder daughter seems to me rather marked."

"I assure you, sir, that my friend's proposal was wholly voluntary, and was in no wise prompted by me."

The old gentleman smiled incredulously.

"My only regret is," continued the judge, "that I allowed Mr. Plateas to discover my secret yesterday. I protest I never had the least thought of urging him to this step; he has taken it of his own accord, and you do me wrong in supposing that I have acted from self-interest."

"I believe it, since you say so, and will not stop to inquire how it happens that he should ask me for the hand of my daughter, whom he does not know, the very day after receiving your confidence."

"But however that may be," he went on, without letting Mr. Liakos speak, "I cannot give you an immediate reply; I must have time to consider the question. Pray do not trouble yourself to call; I will make my decision known to you." The last words were spoken dryly.

The judge went away much disconcerted. It was not a refusal that he had received, nor yet was it a consent; his most serious disquiet was caused by the old man's tone and manner. Although they might have arisen partly from the dispute in the warehouse, it was only too clear that his deep interest in the success of his mission had been as detrimental in awakening the merchant's suspicions as in checking his own eloquence.

How many things he could have said to Mr. Mitrophanis if he had only dared! He felt that his mediation had simply made matters worse, and might prove fatal. A more skilful diplomatist than he would be needed to conduct the affair to a happy ending; why had he not acted on his first impulse and consulted his cousin? Why not go to her even now? Surely his friend could not be offended, especially if the result was successful; the poor judge was in trouble, and longed for encouragement and support; but while he reasoned with himself, his feet were carrying him to his cousin's house, and by the time he reached her door, all his doubt had vanished.

Mr. Liakos found his kinswoman at work converting a jacket of her elder son, which had become too small for its owner, into a garment still too

ample for the younger brother. The boys were at school, while their three sisters--who came between them in age--were studying their lessons under their mother's eye, and at the same time learning domestic economy from her example.

Being a woman of tact, she saw at once from the judge's manner that he wished to speak with her alone, and sent the girls out to play.

"Well, what is it?" she asked as soon as they had left the room.
"What's the news?"

"Why should you think there is any news?"

"Ah, indeed! As if I didn't know you! I could see at a glance that you had something on your mind."

In truth, her feminine insight was seldom at fault in reading Mr. Liakos, for she had seen him grow up from a child, and knew him thoroughly. On his side, the judge flattered himself that he knew her quite as well, but then he ought to have foreseen that her help would not be easily enlisted in an affair that she had not been allowed to manage from the beginning. She enjoyed busying herself with marriages in general and with those of her friends in particular; but she felt that she was peculiarly qualified to assume the chief part in planning and carrying out arrangements of this kind, and unless her claims were recognized, she rarely gave her approval, and even did not hesitate to oppose occasionally. But for his discomfiture at the result of his visit to the old merchant, Mr. Liakos would doubtless have devised some way of conciliating his cousin; it had not occurred to him to take that precaution, and he soon perceived the blunder he had made.

When he announced abruptly that he had found a husband for his sweetheart's sister, his cousin, instead of showing pleasure, or at least some curiosity, quietly continued her sewing with affected indifference, saying merely, "Ah!" This "Ah" was half-way between a question and an exclamation; the judge could not tell whether it expressed irony or simple astonishment; but it was enough to chill him.

"Everything is against me!" he thought.

"And who is your candidate?" she asked after a pause, but without stopping her work.

"Mr. Plateas."

His cousin dropped her needle, and looked at Mr. Liakos with eyes full of mocking surprise.

"Mr. Plateas!" she cried, and began to laugh heartily. The judge had never seen her so merry.

"I don't see what you find to laugh at," he said, with dignity.

"You must forgive me," she replied, trying to stifle her merriment.
"Pray forgive me if I have hurt you through your friend, but I can't imagine Mr. Plateas in love." And she began to laugh again; then seeing the judge's expression, she asked, "What put this marriage into your head?"

"No," he began, without answering her question, "please to tell me what you find so reprehensible in him."

"Reprehensible!" she repeated, imitating her cousin's tone. "I don't find him reprehensible, simply ridiculous."

"I admit that his person is not awe-inspiring."

"Awe-inspiring! What long words you use! You'll be giving me one of your friend's quotations from Homer next."

"Listen," he said, changing his manner. "At first I looked at it just as you do; but the more I thought it over, the more clearly I saw that I was wrong. Mr. Plateas has all the qualities that go to make a good husband. He will be ridiculous as a lover, I must admit. He will look absurd on his wedding day, with the wreath of flowers on his head [Footnote: The Greek bride and bridegroom both wear a wreath of flowers.]---"

At this his cousin broke into a fresh peal of laughter, in which the judge was forced to join in spite of himself. Their sudden gayety having subsided, the conversation became more serious. Mr. Liakos related all the details of the affair, and as his story went on he was delighted to see his cousin's prejudices gradually disappear, although she still made objections when they came to dissect the suitor's character.

"He is a hypochondriac!" she said.

"He takes care of his health," replied the judge, "simply because he has nothing else to occupy him. When once he is married, he'll care for his wife, just as he cared for his mother while she lived and his hypochondria, as you call it, will vanish fast enough."

"He's pedantic."

"That is hardly a grave fault in a professor."

Now that the question had narrowed down to his friend's moral qualities, Mr. Liakos began to feel certain of victory so far as his cousin was concerned. His only remaining doubt was as to the young

lady's consent.

"Her consent!" cried his cousin. "She'll accept Mr. Plateas gladly. Since she can't persuade her father to let her remain single, she will take the first husband that offers, rather than stand in the way of her sister's happiness. She has the soul of an angel," the cousin went on, with enthusiasm. "She doesn't know her own worth; she sees that she is not pretty, and in her humility she even exaggerates her plainness; but her sweet unselfishness is no reason why she should be sacrificed."

"Do you think, then, that it would be a sacrifice to marry Mr. Plateas?"

"How can we tell?"

His cousin's reserve was more propitious than her merriment of a few minutes ago, and Mr. Liakos felt encouraged.

"If she were your sister, or even your daughter, would you not give her to him?"

This question struck deeper than he knew, for one of her daughters was not well-favored, and the girl's future was beginning to give the maternal heart much uneasiness. The mother laughed no longer; her eyes filled, and she made no reply. Without searching into the cause of his cousin's emotion, the judge was only too glad to take her silence for consent.

"Very well," he went on. "Now you must help me to arrange this marriage."

In order to humor her innocent vanity, he pictured the obstacles that she would find in the character of Mr. Mitrophanis, and urged his own inability to overcome them; he frankly declared that his mediation had compromised his friend's suit, and that the affair was far more difficult than if it had been in her hands from the beginning; he insisted that she alone could retrieve the mistakes committed, and bring about a happy ending.

His cousin's objections gradually grew weaker and at last, after three hours of argument, the judge succeeded so well that she left her work (to the temporary disadvantage of her younger son), and put on her bonnet. The two went out together, she to call on Mr. Mitrophanis, and he to find the professor.

V.

Poor Mr. Plateas was waiting for his friend impatiently.

On reaching home he had found his dinner growing cold, and Florou worrying over her master's unusual tardiness; it was full twenty minutes after noon! Although the professor was hungry and ate with relish, his mind was ill at ease. He yearned to talk to some one, but there was no one to talk to. He would have been glad to tell his story even to Florou, but she cared neither to talk nor to listen; conversation was not her strong point.

Besides, her master rather shrank from telling her that he had made up his mind to get married, and that her reign was over. Since his mother's death, Florou had had absolute control over the household; why make her unhappy before it was necessary? On the other hand, he could contain himself no longer; if he had not spoken, there is no telling what would have happened.

Not daring to face the question boldly, he beat about the bush, and tried to pass adroitly from the subject of dinner to that of marriage.

"Florou," he said, "your meat is overdone."

The old woman made no reply, but looked up at the sun as if to suggest that the fault lay not with her, but with her master's tardiness.

He paid no attention to her mute reproach.

"In fact," he went on, "the dinner isn't fit to eat to-day."

"You've eaten it, though."

Florou was in the habit of resorting to this argument as unanswerable. Usually her master laughed and said that he had eaten his dinner because he was hungry, and not because it was good. To-day, however, her phrase irritated him, less on account of the words themselves, than from an inward consciousness that this day of all others he had no right to complain of her culinary art.

In his vexation he forgot how he had planned to lead up to the subject of his marriage, and had to finish his dinner in silence; but while Florou was carrying the dishes away, he thought of a new pretext for coming back to the absorbing topic. He noticed for the first time a hole in the tablecloth that had been there a long time.

"See there!" said he, putting his finger through it. "My house needs a mistress,--there's no other remedy for such a state of things. I must have a wife!"

Florou shrugged her shoulders as though she thought her master had lost his wits.

"Do you understand me? I must get married."

The old woman smiled.

"What are you laughing at? I have quite made up my mind to marry."

Florou stared.

"I'm going to get married, I tell you!"

"And who'll have you?"

"Who will have me!" he cried, fairly choking with rage.

Almost beside himself at the old woman's effrontery, he wanted to crush her with angry eloquence; but her stolidity baffled him, and he went up to his room without a word. When he was alone, his anger soon cooled; but he found himself repeating those cruel words, and as he said them over, he began to fear that Florou was not so far wrong.

He recalled his friend's first disavowal of any thought of him as a suitor, and the father's strange hesitation. And then, why didn't Liakos come; what was keeping him so long? If his mission was successful, he would have brought the news at once. The question was very simple, the answer "yes" or "no"; it surely must be "no," and the judge was keeping back the evil tidings.

How silly he had been to expose himself to a rebuff on the impulse of the moment--what perfect folly! What business had he to get into such a scrape? But no, he had only done his duty; he had proved to his preserver the sincerity of his friendship and the depth of his gratitude. But why didn't Liakos come? Why didn't he hurry back and end this suspense?

The unhappy man looked at his watch again and again, and was astonished each time at the slowness of the hands; they seemed hardly to move at all. He sat down, then jumped up again and looked out of the window,--no Liakos! He tried to read, but could not keep his thoughts from straying, and shut the book petulantly. He was in a perfect fever.

Meanwhile the time came for his daily constitutional, and Mr. Plateas was on thorns. He could not stay indoors waiting for his friend any longer; but in order to be near at hand, he resolved to take his old walk and go no farther than the Vaporia. So he called Florou and told her that he would not be gone long, but that if Mr. Liakos should come, she must send him to the Vaporia. He explained with great care the route he would take in going and in coming back, so that Florou might tell his friend exactly. All this was quite unnecessary, for the road to the Vaporia was so direct that the two friends could hardly help meeting unless they went out of their way to avoid each other; but he insisted upon his topographical directions, and repeated them so often

that Florou at last lost her patience, and exclaimed:

"Very well, very well!"

It was most unusual for the old woman to say the same word twice.

Not a living soul was to be seen on the Vaporia, and Mr. Plateas was able to follow the course of his thoughts undisturbed. To tell the truth, his ideas rather lacked sequence, and were much the same thing over and over; but they were so engrossing that he had not quoted a line of Homer all day. If this worry had lasted much longer, it would have effected what all his exercise and sea-bathing had failed to accomplish; the poor man would certainly have been reduced to a shadow.

And still Liakos did not come! For a moment the professor thought of going to look for his friend; but where should he go? The judge had promised to come, and Florou had been told to get supper for both; Liakos MUST come.

But why didn't he come now? Mr. Plateas paced up and down the Vaporia twenty times at least, and although he kept looking toward his house, there was no sign of the judge. At last! At last he saw his friend coming in the distance.

"Well, is it 'yes' or 'no'?" he cried, as soon as he was near enough to be heard.

"Do let me get my breath first."

From the expression of the poor man's face Mr. Liakos feared that "no" would be more welcome than "yes."

"Can he have repented?" thought the judge; then, taking Mr. Plateas affectionately by the arm, he turned back to prolong the walk, and tried to soothe his friend's amour propre.

"Don't be troubled; she's not a silly girl, but has good sense and good judgment. She will treat your offer as an honor, and will be happy to have a man like you for a husband."

"Never mind about that," said the professor, in a calmer tone. "Tell me how the matter really stands. What have you been doing all this time?"

In relating his story, Mr. Liakos did not tell his friend everything. He passed over the stiffness of Mr. Mitrophanis as well as his cousin's unseemly mirth, and urged so skillfully the need of her good offices as to disarm all objection; he had left the affair in his cousin's charge, and secured her promise to send him word of the result at the professor's house. This was the substance of the conversation; but Mr. Plateas asked so many questions and the judge had to repeat each detail

so often, that the sun was setting when the two friends went back to do justice to Florou's supper.

They had scarcely finished when there was a knock at the door, and Florou came in with a note for Mr. Liakos.

Mr. Plateas rose, napkin in hand, and leaned over his friend's chair, eagerly following the words as the judge read aloud:

"MY DEAR COUSIN,--Bring your friend to my house this evening; the young lady will be there. Come early. YOUR COUSIN."

"What did I tell you!" cried Mr. Liakos, joyfully. "Come, you must get ready."

Mr. Plateas looked very serious; the idea of meeting the young girl made him nervous. What should he say to her? How should he behave? Besides, he was not yet sure of being accepted! Why hadn't the message been a plain "yes" or "no"? The judge had difficulty in persuading Mr. Plateas that the invitation was in itself an assurance of success, and that his cousin and he would do their best to lessen the embarrassment of the meeting. Taking upon himself the duties of valet, Mr. Liakos superintended the poor man's toilet, and having made him look as fine as possible, marched him off.

He would have given almost anything to be well out of the scrape, but it was too late to retreat now.

As they went along, the judge tried in vain to impart some of his own high spirits to his faint-hearted friend. He was brimming over with gladness at the thought of his marriage, which now seemed assured. After so long a separation he was about to see his betrothed, for he felt sore that she would come with her sister. Mr. Plateas had no such reasons for rejoicing. He walked on in silence, paying little heed to his friend's gay sallies; he was trying to think what he should say to the young lady, but nothing came to him.

"By the way," he broke in suddenly, "what is her name?"

"Whose?"

"I mean my future wife. Yesterday I had to let her father see that I didn't even know her name. I mustn't make that mistake to-night!"

At this Mr. Liakos broke into a merry laugh; he was in such high good-humor that he found fun in everything. His companion did not laugh, but repeated:

"What is her name?"

The judge was about to reply when he heard some one coming toward them call out in the darkness:

"Liakos, is that you?"

It was his cousin's husband, who brought word that he was not to be present at the interview. The tactful cousin had felt that it would be better to leave the young lady alone with her suitor; then, too, the younger sister would not come, and the presence of Mr. Liakos was quite unnecessary; her instructions were that he should spend the evening with her husband at the club.

Mr. Plateas felt his knees give way under him. What--go in and face the two ladies all alone! No, decidedly he hadn't the courage for that. But his supporters, one on either side, urged and encouraged the unhappy man until they reached the threshold, when the door opened and they pushed him in, regardless of his protests, then closed it again, and went off to the club.

When Mr. Liakos learned that his sweetheart was not coming, he submitted to his banishment with stoicism; but it seemed to him that the evening at the club would never come to an end. About ten o'clock a servant came to say that Mr. Plateas was waiting for him; he rushed downstairs and found his friend in the street. By the light of a street lamp the judge saw at once from the expression of the suitor's face that the visit had been a complete success. The professor looked like another man.

"Well?" asked Mr. Liakos, eagerly.

"I tell you, she isn't plain at all!" exclaimed Mr. Plateas. "When she speaks her voice is like music, and she has a charming expression! As for her little hand,--it's simply exquisite!"

"You kissed it, I suppose?" said the judge.

"Of course I did!"

"What did you say, and what did she say to you?"

"As though I could tell you everything! The idea!" Then lowering his voice, he added: "Do you know what she said to me? She told me she was glad and grateful that I had asked her to marry me through friendship for you, because such a good friend must make a good husband. I begged her not to say that, else I could not help thinking that she accepted me only out of love for her sister.

"'And why not?' she said gently. 'What sweeter source could the happiness of our future have?'"

Mr. Liakos was touched.

"But really," his friend went on, "I can't begin to tell you everything now. One thing is certain,--I've found a perfect treasure!"

"Did I not tell you so?"

"Yes, but you haven't told me her name, and I didn't dare ask her. What is it?"

The judge bent over and whispered the name that his friend longed to hear.

"There, you know it now."

"Yes, at last!" and the two friends parted,--the one went home with a new joy in his heart, saying over the name he had just learned, while the other softly repeated the name so long dear to him.

A few weeks later, the first Sunday after Easter there was a high festival in the old merchant's house to celebrate the marriage of his two daughters. Of the bridegrooms, Mr. Liakos was not the merrier, for now that his dearest hopes were realized, his soul was filled with a quiet happiness that left no room for words. Mr. Plateas, on the other hand, was overflowing with delight, and his spirits seemed contagious, for all the wedding guests laughed with him. Even His Eminence the Archbishop of Tenos and Syra, who had blessed the double marriage, was jovial with the rest, and showed his learning by wishing the happy couples joy in a line from Homer:

[Greek Text] "Thine own wish may the Gods give thee in every place."

To which Mr. Plateas replied majestically:

[Greek Text] "The best omen is to battle for one's native land!"

After the wedding, the judge obtained three months' leave, and took his bride for a visit to his old home among his kinsfolk.

How eagerly their return was awaited, and how delighted the sisters were to be together again! The old father trembled with joy.

When the two brothers-in-law were alone, each saw his own happiness reflected in the other's face.

"Well, did I exaggerate when I sang your wife's praises?" asked Mr. Liakos.

"She's a treasure, my dear friend!" cried Mr. Plateas,--"a perfect treasure! In a few months," he went on, "I shall have a new favor to

ask of you. I want you to stand as godfather to your nephew."

"What! You too!"

"And you?"



MALATI AND MADHAVA OR THE STOLEN MARRIAGE.

Project Gutenberg's Tales from the Hindu Dramatists, by R. N. Dutta

There lived, in the town of Kundinapura in Berar, Devarata, a very calm and sagacious minister to the king of Vidarbha. He had a son named Madhava. Madhava was very beautiful and of uncommon intelligence. He became proficient in all branches of learning, in his early age. He now arrived at a marriageable age. The beautiful town of Padmavati in Malwa is situated at the confluence of the two rivers Indus and Madhumati. There lived in Padmavati, Bhurivasu, who was minister to the king of Padmavati. He had a very beautiful unmarried daughter named Malati. The king indicated an intention to propose a match between Malati and his own favourite Nandan, who was both old and ugly, and whom she detested. Bhurivasu feared to give offence to the king by refusing the match. Devarata and Bhurivasu were fellow students. In their academical days they pledged themselves that they should enter into matrimonial alliance, if they happen to have children. Malati and Madhava did not know anything about their fathers' promises. There lived in Padmavati, Kamandaki, an old Buddhist priestess who was nurse of Malati. The priestess knew everything about the matrimonial promise. She was a very intelligent lady and was respected by all. The two friends concert a plan with the priestess to throw the young people in each other's way and to connive at a secret marriage. In pursuance of this scheme, Madhava is sent to finish his studies at the city of Padmavati with the ostensible object of studying Logic under the care of the priestess, who takes great care of her pupil and endeavours her utmost to fulfil the promise of her two friends. By her contrivance and with the aid of Malati's foster-sister Lavangika, the young people meet and become mutually enamoured.

Kamandaki addresses her favourite disciple Avalokita thus:--

"Dear Avalokita! Oh how I wish for the marital union of Madhava, the son

of Devarata, and Malati, the daughter of Bhurivasu! Auspicious signs forerun a happy fate. Even now my throbbing eyeball tells that propitious destiny shall crown my schemes."

Avalokita replies:--

"Oh, here is a serious cause of anxiety. How strange! You are already burdened with the austerities of devotional exercises, Bhurivasu has commissioned you to perform this arduous task. Though retired from the world, you could not avoid this business."

Kamandaki says, "Never say so. The commission is an office of love and trust. If my friend's object is gained even at the expense of my life and penances, I shall feel myself gratified."

The pupil asks "why is a stolen marriage intended?"

The priestess answers, "Nandana, a favourite of the king of Padmavati, sues him for Malati. The king demands the maiden of her father. To evade the anger of the king, this ingenious device has been adopted. Let the world deem their union was the work of mutual passion only. So the king and Nandan will be foiled. A wise man veils his projects from the world." The pupil says, "I take Madhava to walk in the street in front of the house of the minister Bhurivasu."

The priestess says,

"I have heard from Lavangika, the foster-sister of Malati, that Malati has seen Madhava from the windows of her house.

Her waning form faithfully betrays the lurking care she now first learns to suffer."

The pupil says, "I have heard that, to soothe that care, Malati has drawn a picture of Madhava and has sent it through Lavangika to Mandarika, her attendant."

The priestess perceives that Malati has done so with the object that the picture would reach Madhava as Mandarika is in love with Kalahansa, the servant of Madhava. Avalokita again says,

"To-day is the great festival of Madan; Malati will surely come to join the festival, I have interested Madhava to go to the garden of Love's god with a view that the youthful pair may meet there."

The priestess replies, "I tender my best thanks for your kindly zeal to aid the object of my wishes. Can you give me any tidings of Soudamini, my former pupil?"

Avalokita answers, "she now resides upon mount _Sripurvata_. She has now

arrived at supernatural power by religious austerities. I have learnt the news about her from Kapala Kundala, the female pupil of a tremendous magician Aghorhanta, a seer and a wandering mendicant, but now residing amidst the neighbouring forest, who frequents the temple of the dreadful goddess _Chamunda_ near the city cemetery." Avalokita remarks, "Madhava would be highly pleased if his early friend Makaranda is united in wedlock with Madayantika, the sister of Nandana."

The priestess observes, "I have already engaged my disciple Buddharakshita for the purpose. Let us go forth and having learnt how Madhava has fared, repair to Malati. May our devices prosper!"

Madhava thus describes to his friend Makaranda his first interview with Malati, and acknowledges himself deeply smitten:--

"One day, advised by Avalokita, I went to the temple of the god of love. I saw there a beauteous maid. I have become a victim to her glances. Her gait was stately. Her train bespoke a princely rank. Her garb was graced with youth's appropriate ornaments. Her form was beauty's shrine, or of that shrine she moved as the guardian deity. Whatever Nature offers fairest and best had surely been assembled to mould her charms. Love omnipotent was her creator. Then I too plainly noted that the lovely maid, revealed the signs of passion long entertained for some happy youth.

Her shape was as slender as the lotus stalk. Her pallid cheeks, like unstained ivory, rivalled the beauty of the spotless moon. I scarcely had gazed upon her, but my eyes felt new delight, as bathed with nectar. She drew my heart at once towards her as powerfully as the magnet does the unresisting iron. That heart, though its sudden passion may be causeless, is fixed on her for ever, chance what may, and though my portion be henceforth despair. The goddess Destiny decrees at pleasure the good or ill of all created beings."

Makaranda observes, "Believe me, this cannot be without some cause. Behold! all nature's sympathies spring not from outward form but from inward virtue. The lotus does not bud till the sun has risen. The moon-gem does not melt till it feels the moon." Madhava goes on with his description thus:--

"When her fair train beheld me, they exchanged expressive looks and smiles and murmured to one another as if they knew me. What firmness could resist the honest warmth of nature's mute expressiveness? Those looks of love, beaming with mild timidity and moist with sweet abandonment, tore off my heart,--nay plucked it from my bosom by the roots, all pierced with wounds. Being incredulous of my happiness, I sought to mark her passion, without displaying my own. A stately elephant received the princess and bore her towards the city. Whilst she moved, she shot from her delicate lids retiring glances, tipped with venom and ambrosia, My breast received the shafts. Words cannot paint my

agony. Vain were the lunar rays or gelid streams to cool my body's fever, whilst my mind whirls in perpetual round and does not know rest. Requested by Lavangika, I gave her the flowery wreath. She took it with respect, as if it were a precious gift and all the while the eyes of Malati were fixed on her. Bowing with reverence, she then retired."

Makaranda remarks--

"Your story most plainly shows that Malati's affection is your own. The soft cheek, whose pallid tint denoted love pre-conceived, is pale alone for you; She must have seen you. Maidens of her rank do not allow their eyes to rest on one to whom they have not already given their hearts. And then, those looks that passed among her maidens plainly showed the passion you had awakened in their mistress.

Then comes her foster-sister's clear enigma and tells intelligibly whose her heart is."

Kalahansa, advancing, shows a picture and says, "This picture is the work of hers who has stolen Madhava's heart. Mandarika gave it to me. She had it from Lavangika, Malati painted it to amuse and relieve distress." Makaranda says, "This lovely maid, the soft light of your eyes, assuredly regards you bound to her in love's alliance. What should prevent your union? Fate and love combined seem labouring to effect it. Come, let me behold the wondrous form that works such change in you. You have the skill. Portray her."

Madhava, in return, delineates the likeness of Malati on the same tablet and Makaranda writes under it the following impassioned love-stanza,

"Whatever nature loveliness displays,
May seem to others beautiful and bright;
But since these charms have broken upon my gaze,
They form my life's sole exquisite delight."

Being asked by Makaranda as to how and where Malati first saw Madhava, Mandarika says, "Malati was called to the lattice by Lavangika to look at him as he passed the palace."

The picture is restored to Mandarika and brought back to Malati.

The mutual passion of the lovers, encouraged by their respective confidants, is naturally increased.

Madhava thus addresses Makaranda,

"It is strange, most strange! wherever I turn, the same loved charms appear on every side. Her beauteous face gleams as brightly as the golden bud of the young lotus. Alas! my friend, this fascination spreads over all my senses. A feverish flame consumes my strength. My heart is

all on fire. My mind is tossed with doubt. Every faculty is absorbed in one fond thought.

I cease to be myself or conscious of the thing I am."

Malati thus addresses Lavangika:--

"Love spreads through every vein like subtlest poison and, like fire that brightens in the breeze, consumes this feeble frame. Resistless fever preys on each fibre. Its fury is fatal. No one can help me. Neither father nor mother nor Lavangika can save me. Life is distasteful to me.

Repeatedly recurring to the anguish of my heart, I lose all fortitude and in my grief become capricious and unjust. Forgive me. Let the full moon blaze in the mighty sky. Let love rage on. Death screens me from his fury."

In the meantime, the king makes the long-expected demand and the minister Bhurivasu returns the following ambiguous answer:--

"Your Majesty may dispose of your daughter as your Majesty pleases."

[This answer is used in a double sense:--

"Your minister's daughter is your own daughter and you can dispose of her as you please," and "You can dispose of your own daughter as you please, but not my daughter."

The father's connivance at his daughter's stolen marriage would appear inconsistent if the reply is not understood in its double sense.]

The intelligence reaches the lovers. They are thrown into despair.

Requested by Lavangika, Kamandaki thus describes Madhava in the presence of Malati:--

"The sovereign of Vidarbha boasts for minister the wise and long-experienced Devarata, who bears the burden of state and spreads throughout the world his piety and fame. Your father knows him well. For, in their youth, they were joined in study and trained to learning by the same preceptor.

In this world we rarely behold such characters as theirs. Their lofty rank is the abode of wisdom and of piety, of valour and of virtue. Their fame spreads white and spotless through the universe. A son has sprung from Devarata whose opening virtues early give occasion of rejoicing to the world. Now, in his bloom, this youth has been sent to our city to collect ripe stores of knowledge. His name is Madhava."

Kamandaki soliloquises thus:--

"Malati is tutored to our wishes and inspired with hatred of the bridegroom Nandan. He is reminded of the examples of _Sakuntala_ and _Vasavadatta_ that vindicate the free choice of a husband. Her admiration of her youthful lover is now approved by his illustrious birth and my encomium of his high descent. All this must strengthen and confirm her passion. Now their union may be left to fate."

By the contrivance of Kamandaki, a second interview between the lovers takes place in the public garden of the temple of _Sankara_. Malati is persuaded that the god _Sankara_ is to be propitiated with offerings of flowers gathered by one's self. Whilst she is collecting her oblation she and Madhava meet as if by accident.

At this moment, a great tumult and terrific screams announce that a tremendous tiger has escaped from an iron cage in the temple of Siva, spreading destruction everywhere. Instantly, Nandana's youthful sister, Madayantika happens to be passing, and is attacked by the tiger and is reported to be in imminent danger.

Madhava and Makaranda both rush to the rescue. The latter kills the animal, and thus saves her who is then brought in a half-fainting state into the garden. He is himself wounded. Madayantika is thus saved by the valour of Makaranda. The gallant youth is brought in insensible. By the care of the women, he revives.

On recovering, Madayantika naturally falls in love with her deliverer.

The two couples are thus brought together. Malati affiances herself there and then to Madhava.

Soon afterwards, the king prepares to enforce the marriage of Malati with Nandan. A messenger arrives to summon Madayantika to be present at the marriage. Another messenger summons Malati herself to the king's place.

Madhava is mad with grief and in despair makes the extraordinary resolution of purchasing the aid of ghosts and malignant spirits by going to the cemetery and offering them living flesh, cut off from his own body, as food. He accordingly bathes in the river Sindhu and goes at night to the cemetery. The cemetery happens to be near the temple of the awful goddess Chamunda, a form of Durga. The temple is presided over by a sorceress named Kapalkundla and her preceptor, a terrible necromancer Aghorghanta. They have determined on offering some beautiful maiden as a human victim to the goddess. With this object they carry off Malati, before her departure, while asleep on a terrace and bringing her to the temple, are about to kill her at the shrine when her cries of distress attract the attention of Madhava, who is, at the moment, in the cemetery offering his flesh to the ghosts.

He thinks he recognizes the voice of Malati. He rushes forward to her rescue. She is discovered dressed as a victim and the magician and the sorceress are preparing for the sacrifice.

He encounters Aghorghanta and, after a terrific hand-to-hand fight, kills him and rescues Malati.

She flies to his arms. Voices are heard as of persons in search of Malati. Madhava places her in safety.

The sorceress vows vengeance against Madhava for slaying her preceptor Aghorghanta.

Malati is now restored to her friends. The preparations for Malati's wedding with Nandana goes on. The old priestess Kamandaki, who favours the union of Malati with her lover Madhava, contrives that, by the king's command, the bridal dress shall be put on at the very temple where her own ministrations are conducted.

There she persuades Makaranda to substitute himself for the bride. He puts on the bridal dress, is carried in procession to the house of Nandan and goes through the form of being married to him. Nandana, being disgusted with the masculine appearance of the pretended bride, and offended by the rude reception given to him, vows to have no further communication with her and consigns her to his sister's care in the inner apartments. This enabled Makaranda to effect an interview with Nandana's sister Madayantika, the object of his own affections.

Makaranda then discovers himself to his mistress and persuades her to run away with him to the place where Malati and Madhava have concealed themselves.

Their flight is discovered. The king's guards are sent in pursuit. A great fight follows; but Makaranda, assisted by Madhava, defeats his opponents. The bravery and handsome appearance of the two youths avert the king's anger and they are allowed to join their friends unpunished.

The friends accordingly assemble at the gate of the temple.

But the sorceress, who has been watching an opportunity when Malati is unprotected, takes advantage of the confusion and carries her off in a flying car, in revenge for the death of her preceptor. The distress of her lover and friends knows no bounds. They are reduced to despair at this second obstacle to the marriage. They give up all hopes of recovering her when they are happily relieved by the opportune arrival of Soudamini, an old pupil of the priestess Kamandaki, who has acquired extraordinary magical powers by her penances.

She rescues Malati from the hands of the sorceress and restores her to

her despairing lover.

The two couples are now united in happy wedlock.



MRS. PURKAPILE

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Spoon River Anthology*, by Edgar Lee Masters

HE ran away and was gone for a year.
When he came home he told me the silly story
Of being kidnapped by pirates on Lake Michigan
And kept in chains so he could not write me.
I pretended to believe it, though I knew very well
What he was doing, and that he met
The milliner, Mrs. Williams, now and then
When she went to the city to buy goods, as she said.
But a promise is a promise
And marriage is marriage,
And out of respect for my own character
I refused to be drawn into a divorce
By the scheme of a husband who had merely grown tired
Of his marital vow and duty.



THE MISSION OF JANE

Project Gutenberg's *The Descent of Man and Other Stories*, by Edith Wharton

I

LETHBURY, surveying his wife across the dinner table, found his transient conjugal glance arrested by an indefinable change in her

appearance.

"How smart you look! Is that a new gown?" he asked.

Her answering look seemed to deprecate his charging her with the extravagance of wasting a new gown on him, and he now perceived that the change lay deeper than any accident of dress. At the same time, he noticed that she betrayed her consciousness of it by a delicate, almost frightened blush. It was one of the compensations of Mrs. Lethbury's protracted childishness that she still blushed as prettily as at eighteen. Her body had been privileged not to outstrip her mind, and the two, as it seemed to Lethbury, were destined to travel together through an eternity of girlishness.

"I don't know what you mean," she said.

Since she never did, he always wondered at her bringing this out as a fresh grievance against him; but his wonder was unresentful, and he said good-humoredly: "You sparkle so that I thought you had on your diamonds."

She sighed and blushed again.

"It must be," he continued, "that you've been to a dressmaker's opening. You're absolutely brimming with illicit enjoyment."

She stared again, this time at the adjective. His adjectives always embarrassed her: their unintelligibleness savored of impropriety.

"In short," he summed up, "you've been doing something that you're thoroughly ashamed of."

To his surprise she retorted: "I don't see why I should be ashamed of it!"

Lethbury leaned back with a smile of enjoyment. When there was nothing better going he always liked to listen to her explanations.

"Well--?" he said.

She was becoming breathless and ejaculatory. "Of course you'll laugh--you laugh at everything!"

"That rather blunts the point of my derision, doesn't it?" he interjected; but she rushed on without noticing:

"It's so easy to laugh at things."

"Ah," murmured Lethbury with relish, "that's Aunt Sophronia's, isn't it?"

Most of his wife's opinions were heirlooms, and he took a quaint pleasure in tracing their descent. She was proud of their age, and saw no reason for discarding them while they were still serviceable. Some, of course, were so fine that she kept them for state occasions, like her great-grandmother's Crown Derby; but from the lady known as Aunt Sophronia she had inherited a stout set of every-day prejudices that were practically as good as new; whereas her husband's, as she noticed, were always having to be replaced. In the early days she had fancied there might be a certain satisfaction in taxing him with the fact; but she had long since been silenced by the reply: "My dear, I'm not a rich man, but I never use an opinion twice if I can help it."

She was reduced, therefore, to dwelling on his moral deficiencies; and one of the most obvious of these was his refusal to take things seriously. On this occasion, however, some ulterior purpose kept her from taking up his taunt.

"I'm not in the least ashamed!" she repeated, with the air of shaking a banner to the wind; but the domestic atmosphere being calm, the banner drooped unheroically.

"That," said Lethbury judicially, "encourages me to infer that you ought to be, and that, consequently, you've been giving yourself the unusual pleasure of doing something I shouldn't approve of."

She met this with an almost solemn directness. "No," she said. "You won't approve of it. I've allowed for that."

"Ah," he exclaimed, setting down his liqueur-glass. "You've worked out the whole problem, eh?"

"I believe so."

"That's uncommonly interesting. And what is it?"

She looked at him quietly. "A baby."

If it was seldom given her to surprise him, she had attained the distinction for once.

"A baby?"

"Yes."

"A--human baby?"

"Of course!" she cried, with the virtuous resentment of the woman who has never allowed dogs in the house.

Lethbury's puzzled stare broke into a fresh smile. "A baby I sha'n't approve of? Well, in the abstract I don't think much of them, I admit. Is this an abstract baby?"

Again she frowned at the adjective; but she had reached a pitch of exaltation at which such obstacles could not deter her.

"It's the loveliest baby--" she murmured.

"Ah, then it's concrete. It exists. In this harsh world it draws its breath in pain--"

"It's the healthiest child I ever saw!" she indignantly corrected.

"You've seen it, then?"

Again the accusing blush suffused her. "Yes--I've seen it."

"And to whom does the paragon belong?"

And here indeed she confounded him. "To me--I hope," she declared.

He pushed his chair back with an inarticulate murmur. "To _you_--?"

"To _us_," she corrected.

"Good Lord!" he said. If there had been the least hint of hallucination in her transparent gaze--but no: it was as clear, as shallow, as easily fathomable as when he had first suffered the sharp surprise of striking bottom in it.

It occurred to him that perhaps she was trying to be funny: he knew that there is nothing more cryptic than the humor of the unhumorous.

"Is it a joke?" he faltered.

"Oh, I hope not. I want it so much to be a reality--"

He paused to smile at the limitations of a world in which jokes were not realities, and continued gently: "But since it is one already--"

"To us, I mean: to you and me. I want--" her voice wavered, and her eyes with it. "I have always wanted so dreadfully...it has been such a disappointment...not to..."

"I see," said Lethbury slowly.

But he had not seen before. It seemed curious, now, that he had never thought of her taking it in that way, had never surmised any hidden depths beneath her outspread obviousness. He felt as though he had

touched a secret spring in her mind.

There was a moment's silence, moist and tremulous on her part, awkward and slightly irritated on his.

"You've been lonely, I suppose?" he began. It was odd, having suddenly to reckon with the stranger who gazed at him out of her trivial eyes.

"At times," she said.

"I'm sorry."

"It was not your fault. A man has so many occupations; and women who are clever--or very handsome--I suppose that's an occupation too. Sometimes I've felt that when dinner was ordered I had nothing to do till the next day."

"Oh," he groaned.

"It wasn't your fault," she insisted. "I never told you--but when I chose that rose-bud paper for the front room upstairs, I always thought--"

"Well--?"

"It would be such a pretty paper--for a baby--to wake up in. That was years ago, of course; but it was rather an expensive paper... and it hasn't faded in the least..." she broke off incoherently.

"It hasn't faded?"

"No--and so I thought...as we don't use the room for anything ... now that Aunt Sophronia is dead...I thought I might... you might...oh, Julian, if you could only have seen it just waking up in its crib!"

"Seen what--where? You haven't got a baby upstairs?"

"Oh, no--not _yet_," she said, with her rare laugh--the girlish bubbling of merriment that had seemed one of her chief graces in the early days. It occurred to him that he had not given her enough things to laugh about lately. But then she needed such very elementary things: it was as difficult to amuse her as a savage. He concluded that he was not sufficiently simple.

"Alice," he said, almost solemnly, "what _do_ you mean?"

She hesitated a moment: he saw her gather her courage for a supreme effort. Then she said slowly, gravely, as though she were pronouncing a sacramental phrase:

"I'm so lonely without a little child--and I thought perhaps you'd let me adopt one....It's at the hospital...its mother is dead...and I could...pet it, and dress it, and do things for it...and it's such a good baby...you can ask any of the nurses...it would never, never bother you by crying..."

II

Lethbury accompanied his wife to the hospital in a mood of chastened wonder. It did not occur to him to oppose her wish. He knew, of course, that he would have to bear the brunt of the situation: the jokes at the club, the inquiries, the explanations. He saw himself in the comic role of the adopted father, and welcomed it as an expiation. For in his rapid reconstruction of the past he found himself cutting a shabbier figure than he cared to admit. He had always been intolerant of stupid people, and it was his punishment to be convicted of stupidity. As his mind traversed the years between his marriage and this unexpected assumption of paternity, he saw, in the light of an overheated imagination, many signs of unwonted crassness. It was not that he had ceased to think his wife stupid: she was stupid, limited, inflexible; but there was a pathos in the struggles of her swaddled mind, in its blind reachings toward the primal emotions. He had always thought she would have been happier with a child; but he had thought it mechanically, because it had so often been thought before, because it was in the nature of things to think it of every woman, because his wife was so eminently one of a species that she fitted into all the generalizations on the sex. But he had regarded this generalization as merely typical of the triumph of tradition over experience. Maternity was no doubt the supreme function of primitive woman, the one end to which her whole organism tended; but the law of increasing complexity had operated in both sexes, and he had not seriously supposed that, outside the world of Christmas fiction and anecdotic art, such truisms had any special hold on the feminine imagination. Now he saw that the arts in question were kept alive by the vitality of the sentiments they appealed to.

Lethbury was in fact going through a rapid process of readjustment. His marriage had been a failure, but he had preserved toward his wife the exact fidelity of act that is sometimes supposed to excuse any divagation of feeling; so that, for years, the tie between them had consisted mainly in his abstaining from making love to other women. The abstention had not always been easy, for the world is surprisingly well-stocked with the kind of woman one ought to have married but did not; and Lethbury had not escaped the solicitation of such alternatives. His immunity had been purchased at the cost of taking refuge in the somewhat rarified atmosphere of his perceptions; and his world being thus limited, he had given unusual care to its details, compensating himself for the narrowness of his horizon by the minute finish of his foreground. It was a world of fine shadings and the

nicest proportions, where impulse seldom set a blundering foot, and the feast of reason was undisturbed by an intemperate flow of soul. To such a banquet his wife naturally remained uninvited. The diet would have disagreed with her, and she would probably have objected to the other guests. But Lethbury, miscalculating her needs, had hitherto supposed that he had made ample provision for them, and was consequently at liberty to enjoy his own fare without any reproach of mendicancy at his gates. Now he beheld her pressing a starved face against the windows of his life, and in his imaginative reaction he invested her with a pathos borrowed from the sense of his own shortcomings.

In the hospital, the imaginative process continued with increasing force. He looked at his wife with new eyes. Formerly she had been to him a mere bundle of negations, a labyrinth of dead walls and bolted doors. There was nothing behind the walls, and the doors led no-whither: he had sounded and listened often enough to be sure of that. Now he felt like a traveller who, exploring some ancient ruin, comes on an inner cell, intact amid the general dilapidation, and painted with images which reveal the forgotten uses of the building.

His wife stood by a white crib in one of the wards. In the crib lay a child, a year old, the nurse affirmed, but to Lethbury's eye a mere dateless fragment of humanity projected against a background of conjecture. Over this anonymous particle of life Mrs. Lethbury leaned, such ecstasy reflected in her face as strikes up, in Correggio's Night-piece, from the child's body to the mother's countenance. It was a light that irradiated and dazzled her. She looked up at an inquiry of Lethbury's, but as their glances met he perceived that she no longer saw him, that he had become as invisible to her as she had long been to him. He had to transfer his question to the nurse.

"What is the child's name?" he asked.

"We call her Jane," said the nurse.

III

Lethbury, at first, had resisted the idea of a legal adoption; but when he found that his wife's curiously limited imagination prevented her regarding the child as hers till it had been made so by process of law, he promptly withdrew his objection. On one point only he remained inflexible; and that was the changing of the waif's name. Mrs. Lethbury, almost at once, had expressed a wish to rechristen it: she fluctuated between Muriel and Gladys, deferring the moment of decision like a lady wavering between two bonnets. But Lethbury was unyielding. In the general surrender of his prejudices this one alone held out.

"But Jane is so dreadful," Mrs. Lethbury protested.

"Well, we don't know that _she_ won't be dreadful. She may grow up a Jane."

His wife exclaimed reproachfully. "The nurse says she's the loveliest--"

"Don't they always say that?" asked Lethbury patiently. He was prepared to be inexhaustibly patient now that he had reached a firm foothold of opposition.

"It's cruel to call her Jane," Mrs. Lethbury pleaded.

"It's ridiculous to call her Muriel."

"The nurse is _sure_ she must be a lady's child."

Lethbury winced: he had tried, all along, to keep his mind off the question of antecedents.

"Well, let her prove it," he said, with a rising sense of exasperation. He wondered how he could ever have allowed himself to be drawn into such a ridiculous business; for the first time he felt the full irony of it. He had visions of coming home in the afternoon to a house smelling of linseed and paregoric, and of being greeted by a chronic howl as he went up stairs to dress for dinner. He had never been a club-man, but he saw himself becoming one now.

The worst of his anticipations were unfulfilled. The baby was surprisingly well and surprisingly quiet. Such infantile remedies as she absorbed were not potent enough to be perceived beyond the nursery; and when Lethbury could be induced to enter that sanctuary, there was nothing to jar his nerves in the mild pink presence of his adopted daughter. Jars there were, indeed: they were probably inevitable in the disturbed routine of the household; but they occurred between Mrs. Lethbury and the nurses, and Jane contributed to them only a placid stare which might have served as a rebuke to the combatants.

In the reaction from his first impulse of atonement, Lethbury noted with sharpened perceptions the effect of the change on his wife's character. He saw already the error of supposing that it could work any transformation in her. It simply magnified her existing qualities. She was like a dried sponge put in water: she expanded, but she did not change her shape. From the stand-point of scientific observation it was curious to see how her stored instincts responded to the pseudo-maternal call. She overflowed with the petty maxims of the occasion. One felt in her the epitome, the consummation, of centuries of animal maternity, so that this little woman, who screamed at a mouse and was nervous about burglars, came to typify the cave-mother rending her prey for her young.

It was less easy to regard philosophically the practical effects of her

borrowed motherhood. Lethbury found with surprise that she was becoming assertive and definite. She no longer represented the negative side of his life; she showed, indeed, a tendency to inconvenient affirmations. She had gradually expanded her assumption of motherhood till it included his own share in the relation, and he suddenly found himself regarded as the father of Jane. This was a contingency he had not foreseen, and it took all his philosophy to accept it; but there were moments of compensation. For Mrs. Lethbury was undoubtedly happy for the first time in years; and the thought that he had tardily contributed to this end reconciled him to the irony of the means.

At first he was inclined to reproach himself for still viewing the situation from the outside, for remaining a spectator instead of a participant. He had been allured, for a moment, by the vision of severed hands meeting over a cradle, as the whole body of domestic fiction bears witness to their doing; and the fact that no such conjunction took place he could explain only on the ground that it was a borrowed cradle. He did not dislike the little girl. She still remained to him a hypothetical presence, a query rather than a fact; but her nearness was not unpleasant, and there were moments when her tentative utterances, her groping steps, seemed to loosen the dry accretions enveloping his inner self. But even at such moments--moments which he invited and caressed--she did not bring him nearer to his wife. He now perceived that he had made a certain place in his life for Mrs. Lethbury, and that she no longer fitted into it. It was too late to enlarge the space, and so she overflowed and encroached. Lethbury struggled against the sense of submergence. He let down barrier after barrier, yielded privacy after privacy; but his wife's personality continued to dilate. She was no longer herself alone: she was herself and Jane. Gradually, in a monstrous fusion of identity, she became herself, himself and Jane; and instead of trying to adapt her to a spare crevice of his character, he found himself carelessly squeezed into the smallest compartment of the domestic economy.

IV

He continued to tell himself that he was satisfied if his wife was happy; and it was not till the child's tenth year that he felt a doubt of her happiness.

Jane had been a preternaturally good child. During the eight years of her adoption she had caused her foster-parents no anxiety beyond those connected with the usual succession of youthful diseases. But her unknown progenitors had given her a robust constitution, and she passed unperturbed through measles, chicken-pox and whooping-cough. If there was any suffering it was endured vicariously by Mrs. Lethbury, whose temperature rose and fell with the patient's, and who could not hear Jane sneeze without visions of a marble angel weeping over a broken column. But though Jane's prompt recoveries continued to belie such

premonitions, though her existence continued to move forward on an even keel of good health and good conduct, Mrs. Lethbury's satisfaction showed no corresponding advance. Lethbury, at first, was disposed to add her disappointment to the long list of feminine inconsistencies with which the sententious observer of life builds up his favorite induction; but circumstances presently led him to take a kindlier view of the case.

Hitherto his wife had regarded him as a negligible factor in Jane's evolution. Beyond providing for his adopted daughter, and effacing himself before her, he was not expected to contribute to her well-being. But as time passed he appeared to his wife in a new light. It was he who was to educate Jane. In matters of the intellect, Mrs. Lethbury was the first to declare her deficiencies--to proclaim them, even, with a certain virtuous superiority. She said she did not pretend to be clever, and there was no denying the truth of the assertion. Now, however, she seemed less ready, not to own her limitations, but to glory in them. Confronted with the problem of Jane's instruction, she stood in awe of the child.

"I have always been stupid, you know," she said to Lethbury with a new humility, "and I'm afraid I sha'n't know what is best for Jane. I'm sure she has a wonderfully good mind, and I should reproach myself if I didn't give her every opportunity." She looked at him helplessly. "You must tell me what ought to be done."

Lethbury was not unwilling to oblige her. Somewhere in his mental lumber-room there rusted a theory of education such as usually lingers among the impedimenta of the childless. He brought this out, refurbished it, and applied it to Jane. At first he thought his wife had not overrated the quality of the child's mind. Jane seemed extraordinarily intelligent. Her precocious definiteness of mind was encouraging to her inexperienced preceptor. She had no difficulty in fixing her attention, and he felt that every fact he imparted was being etched in metal. He helped his wife to engage the best teachers, and for a while continued to take an ex-official interest in his adopted daughter's studies. But gradually his interest waned. Jane's ideas did not increase with her acquisitions. Her young mind remained a mere receptacle for facts: a kind of cold-storage from which anything that had been put there could be taken out at a moment's notice, intact but congealed. She developed, moreover, an inordinate pride in the capacity of her mental storehouse, and a tendency to pelt her public with its contents. She was overheard to jeer at her nurse for not knowing when the Saxon Heptarchy had fallen, and she alternately dazzled and depressed Mrs. Lethbury by the wealth of her chronological allusions. She showed no interest in the significance of the facts she amassed: she simply collected dates as another child might have collected stamps or marbles. To her foster-mother she seemed a prodigy of wisdom; but Lethbury saw, with a secret movement of sympathy, how the aptitudes in which Mrs. Lethbury gloried were slowly estranging her from their

possessor.

"She is getting too clever for me," his wife said to him, after one of Jane's historical flights, "but I am so glad that she will be a companion to you."

Lethbury groaned in spirit. He did not look forward to Jane's companionship. She was still a good little girl: but there was something automatic and formal in her goodness, as though it were a kind of moral calisthenics that she went through for the sake of showing her agility. An early consciousness of virtue had moreover constituted her the natural guardian and adviser of her elders. Before she was fifteen she had set about reforming the household. She took Mrs. Lethbury in hand first; then she extended her efforts to the servants, with consequences more disastrous to the domestic harmony; and lastly she applied herself to Lethbury. She proved to him by statistics that he smoked too much, and that it was injurious to the optic nerve to read in bed. She took him to task for not going to church more regularly, and pointed out to him the evils of desultory reading. She suggested that a regular course of study encourages mental concentration, and hinted that inconsecutiveness of thought is a sign of approaching age.

To her adopted mother her suggestions were equally pertinent. She instructed Mrs. Lethbury in an improved way of making beef stock, and called her attention to the unhygienic qualities of carpets. She poured out distracting facts about bacilli and vegetable mould, and demonstrated that curtains and picture-frames are a hot-bed of animal organisms. She learned by heart the nutritive ingredients of the principal articles of diet, and revolutionized the cuisine by an attempt to establish a scientific average between starch and phosphates. Four cooks left during this experiment, and Lethbury fell into the habit of dining at his club.

Once or twice, at the outset, he had tried to check Jane's ardor; but his efforts resulted only in hurting his wife's feelings. Jane remained impervious, and Mrs. Lethbury resented any attempt to protect her from her daughter. Lethbury saw that she was consoled for the sense of her own inferiority by the thought of what Jane's intellectual companionship must be to him; and he tried to keep up the illusion by enduring with what grace he might the blighting edification of Jane's discourse.

V

As Jane grew up, he sometimes avenged himself by wondering if his wife was still sorry that they had not called her Muriel. Jane was not ugly; she developed, indeed, a kind of categorical prettiness that might have been a projection of her mind. She had a creditable collection of

features, but one had to take an inventory of them to find out that she was good-looking. The fusing grace had been omitted.

Mrs. Lethbury took a touching pride in her daughter's first steps in the world. She expected Jane to take by her complexion those whom she did not capture by her learning. But Jane's rosy freshness did not work any perceptible ravages. Whether the young men guessed the axioms on her lips and detected the encyclopaedia in her eye, or whether they simply found no intrinsic interest in these features, certain it is, that, in spite of her mother's heroic efforts, and of incessant calls on Lethbury's purse, Jane, at the end of her first season, had dropped hopelessly out of the running. A few duller girls found her interesting, and one or two young men came to the house with the object of meeting other young women; but she was rapidly becoming one of the social supernumeraries who are asked out only because they are on people's lists.

The blow was bitter to Mrs. Lethbury; but she consoled herself with the idea that Jane had failed because she was too clever. Jane probably shared this conviction; at all events she betrayed no consciousness of failure. She had developed a pronounced taste for society, and went out, unweariedly and obstinately, winter after winter, while Mrs. Lethbury toiled in her wake, showering attentions on oblivious hostesses. To Lethbury there was something at once tragic and exasperating in the sight of their two figures, the one conciliatory, the other dogged, both pursuing with unabated zeal the elusive prize of popularity. He even began to feel a personal stake in the pursuit, not as it concerned Jane, but as it affected his wife. He saw that the latter was the victim of Jane's disappointment: that Jane was not above the crude satisfaction of "taking it out" of her mother. Experience checked the impulse to come to his wife's defence; and when his resentment was at its height, Jane disarmed him by giving up the struggle.

Nothing was said to mark her capitulation; but Lethbury noticed that the visiting ceased, and that the dressmaker's bills diminished. At the same time, Mrs. Lethbury made it known that Jane had taken up charities; and before long Jane's conversation confirmed this announcement. At first Lethbury congratulated himself on the change; but Jane's domesticity soon began to weigh on him. During the day she was sometimes absent on errands of mercy; but in the evening she was always there. At first she and Mrs. Lethbury sat in the drawing-room together, and Lethbury smoked in the library; but presently Jane formed the habit of joining him there, and he began to suspect that he was included among the objects of her philanthropy.

Mrs. Lethbury confirmed the suspicion. "Jane has grown very serious-minded lately," she said. "She imagines that she used to neglect you, and she is trying to make up for it. Don't discourage her," she added innocently.

Such a plea delivered Lethbury helpless to his daughter's ministrations: and he found himself measuring the hours he spent with her by the amount of relief they must be affording her mother. There were even moments when he read a furtive gratitude in Mrs. Lethbury's eye.

But Lethbury was no hero, and he had nearly reached the limit of vicarious endurance when something wonderful happened. They never quite knew afterward how it had come about, or who first perceived it; but Mrs. Lethbury one day gave tremulous voice to their inferences.

"Of course," she said, "he comes here because of Elise." The young lady in question, a friend of Jane's, was possessed of attractions which had already been found to explain the presence of masculine visitors.

Lethbury risked a denial. "I don't think he does," he declared.

"But Elise is thought very pretty," Mrs. Lethbury insisted.

"I can't help that," said Lethbury doggedly.

He saw a faint light in his wife's eyes; but she remarked carelessly: "Mr. Budd would be a very good match for Elise."

Lethbury could hardly repress a chuckle: he was so exquisitely aware that she was trying to propitiate the gods.

For a few weeks neither said a word; then Mrs. Lethbury once more reverted to the subject.

"It is a month since Elise went abroad," she said.

"Is it?"

"And Mr. Budd seems to come here just as often--"

"Ah," said Lethbury with heroic indifference; and his wife hastily changed the subject.

Mr. Winstanley Budd was a young man who suffered from an excess of manner. Politeness gushed from him in the driest seasons. He was always performing feats of drawing-room chivalry, and the approach of the most unobtrusive female threw him into attitudes which endangered the furniture. His features, being of the cherubic order, did not lend themselves to this role; but there were moments when he appeared to dominate them, to force them into compliance with an aquiline ideal. The range of Mr. Budd's social benevolence made its object hard to distinguish. He spread his cloak so indiscriminately that one could not always interpret the gesture, and Jane's impassive manner had the

effect of increasing his demonstrations: she threw him into paroxysms of politeness.

At first he filled the house with his amenities; but gradually it became apparent that his most dazzling effects were directed exclusively to Jane. Lethbury and his wife held their breath and looked away from each other. They pretended not to notice the frequency of Mr. Budd's visits, they struggled against an imprudent inclination to leave the young people too much alone. Their conclusions were the result of indirect observation, for neither of them dared to be caught watching Mr. Budd: they behaved like naturalists on the trail of a rare butterfly.

In his efforts not to notice Mr. Budd, Lethbury centred his attentions on Jane; and Jane, at this crucial moment, wrung from him a reluctant admiration. While her parents went about dissembling their emotions, she seemed to have none to conceal. She betrayed neither eagerness nor surprise; so complete was her unconcern that there were moments when Lethbury feared it was obtuseness, when he could hardly help whispering to her that now was the moment to lower the net.

Meanwhile the velocity of Mr. Budd's gyrations increased with the ardor of courtship: his politeness became incandescent, and Jane found herself the centre of a pyrotechnical display culminating in the "set piece" of an offer of marriage.

Mrs. Lethbury imparted the news to her husband one evening after their daughter had gone to bed. The announcement was made and received with an air of detachment, as though both feared to be betrayed into unseemly exultation; but Lethbury, as his wife ended, could not repress the inquiry, "Have they decided on a day?"

Mrs. Lethbury's superior command of her features enabled her to look shocked. "What can you be thinking of? He only offered himself at five!"

"Of course--of course--" stammered Lethbury--"but nowadays people marry after such short engagements--"

"Engagement!" said his wife solemnly. "There is no engagement."

Lethbury dropped his cigar. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Jane is thinking it over."

"Thinking it over?" "She has asked for a month before deciding."

Lethbury sank back with a gasp. Was it genius or was it madness? He felt incompetent to decide; and Mrs. Lethbury's next words showed that she shared his difficulty.

"Of course I don't want to hurry Jane--"

"Of course not," he acquiesced.

"But I pointed out to her that a young man of Mr. Budd's impulsive temperament might--might be easily discouraged--"

"Yes; and what did she say?"

"She said that if she was worth winning she was worth waiting for."

VI

The period of Mr. Budd's probation could scarcely have cost him as much mental anguish as it caused his would-be parents-in-law.

Mrs. Lethbury, by various ruses, tried to shorten the ordeal, but Jane remained inexorable; and each morning Lethbury came down to breakfast with the certainty of finding a letter of withdrawal from her discouraged suitor.

When at length the decisive day came, and Mrs. Lethbury, at its close, stole into the library with an air of chastened joy, they stood for a moment without speaking; then Mrs. Lethbury paid a fitting tribute to the proprieties by faltering out: "It will be dreadful to have to give her up--"

Lethbury could not repress a warning gesture; but even as it escaped him, he realized that his wife's grief was genuine.

"Of course, of course," he said, vainly sounding his own emotional shallows for an answering regret. And yet it was his wife who had suffered most from Jane!

He had fancied that these sufferings would be effaced by the milder atmosphere of their last weeks together; but felicity did not soften Jane. Not for a moment did she relax her dominion: she simply widened it to include a new subject. Mr. Budd found himself under orders with the others; and a new fear assailed Lethbury as he saw Jane assume prenuptial control of her betrothed. Lethbury had never felt any strong personal interest in Mr. Budd; but, as Jane's prospective husband, the young man excited his sympathy. To his surprise, he found that Mrs. Lethbury shared the feeling.

"I'm afraid he may find Jane a little exacting," she said, after an evening dedicated to a stormy discussion of the wedding arrangements. "She really ought to make some concessions. If he wants to be married in a black frock-coat instead of a dark gray one--" She paused and looked doubtfully at Lethbury.

"What can I do about it?" he said.

"You might explain to him--tell him that Jane isn't always--"

Lethbury made an impatient gesture. "What are you afraid of? His finding her out or his not finding her out?"

Mrs. Lethbury flushed. "You put it so dreadfully!"

Her husband mused for a moment; then he said with an air of cheerful hypocrisy: "After all, Budd is old enough to take care of himself."

But the next day Mrs. Lethbury surprised him. Late in the afternoon she entered the library, so breathless and inarticulate that he scented a catastrophe.

"I've done it!" she cried.

"Done what?"

"Told him." She nodded toward the door. "He's just gone. Jane is out, and I had a chance to talk to him alone."

Lethbury pushed a chair forward and she sank into it.

"What did you tell him? That she is not always--"

Mrs. Lethbury lifted a tragic eye. "No; I told him that she always is--"

"Always is--?"

"Yes."

There was a pause. Lethbury made a call on his hoarded philosophy. He saw Jane suddenly reinstated in her evening seat by the library fire; but an answering chord in him thrilled at his wife's heroism.

"Well--what did he say?"

Mrs. Lethbury's agitation deepened. It was clear that the blow had fallen.

"He...he said...that we...had never understood Jane... or appreciated her..." The final syllables were lost in her handkerchief, and she left him marvelling at the mechanism of a woman.

After that, Lethbury faced the future with an undaunted eye. They had done their duty--at least his wife had done hers--and they were reaping

the usual harvest of ingratitude with a zest seldom accorded to such reaping. There was a marked change in Mr. Budd's manner, and his increasing coldness sent a genial glow through Lethbury's system. It was easy to bear with Jane in the light of Mr. Budd's disapproval.

There was a good deal to be borne in the last days, and the brunt of it fell on Mrs. Lethbury. Jane marked her transition to the married state by an appropriate but incongruous display of nerves. She became sentimental, hysterical and reluctant. She quarrelled with her betrothed and threatened to return the ring. Mrs. Lethbury had to intervene, and Lethbury felt the hovering sword of destiny. But the blow was suspended. Mr. Budd's chivalry was proof against all his bride's caprices, and his devotion throve on her cruelty. Lethbury feared that he was too faithful, too enduring, and longed to urge him to vary his tactics. Jane presently reappeared with the ring on her finger, and consented to try on the wedding-dress; but her uncertainties, her reactions, were prolonged till the final day.

When it dawned, Lethbury was still in an ecstasy of apprehension. Feeling reasonably sure of the principal actors, he had centred his fears on incidental possibilities. The clergyman might have a stroke, or the church might burn down, or there might be something wrong with the license. He did all that was humanly possible to avert such contingencies, but there remained that incalculable factor known as the hand of God. Lethbury seemed to feel it groping for him.

In the church it almost had him by the nape. Mr. Budd was late; and for five immeasurable minutes Lethbury and Jane faced a churchful of conjecture. Then the bridegroom appeared, flushed but chivalrous, and explaining to his father-in-law under cover of the ritual that he had torn his glove and had to go back for another.

"You'll be losing the ring next," muttered Lethbury; but Mr. Budd produced this article punctually, and a moment or two later was bearing its wearer captive down the aisle.

At the wedding-breakfast Lethbury caught his wife's eye fixed on him in mild disapproval, and understood that his hilarity was exceeding the bounds of fitness. He pulled himself together, and tried to subdue his tone; but his jubilation bubbled over like a champagne-glass perpetually refilled. The deeper his draughts, the higher it rose.

It was at the brim when, in the wake of the dispersing guests, Jane came down in her travelling-dress and fell on her mother's neck.

"I can't leave you!" she wailed, and Lethbury felt as suddenly sobered as a man under a douche. But if the bride was reluctant her captor was relentless. Never had Mr. Budd been more dominant, more aquiline. Lethbury's last fears were dissipated as the young man snatched Jane from her mother's bosom and bore her off to the brougham.

The brougham rolled away, the last milliner's girl forsook her post by the awning, the red carpet was folded up, and the house door closed. Lethbury stood alone in the hall with his wife. As he turned toward her, he noticed the look of tired heroism in her eyes, the deepened lines of her face. They reflected his own symptoms too accurately not to appeal to him. The nervous tension had been horrible. He went up to her, and an answering impulse made her lay a hand on his arm. He held it there a moment.

"Let us go off and have a jolly little dinner at a restaurant," he proposed.

There had been a time when such a suggestion would have surprised her to the verge of disapproval; but now she agreed to it at once.

"Oh, that would be so nice," she murmured with a great sigh of relief and assuagement.

Jane had fulfilled her mission after all: she had drawn them together at last.



HALL OF THE MISSING FOOTSTEPS

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Visionaries*, by James Huneker

So I saw in my dream that the man began to run.

--Pilgrim's Progress.

I

As the first-class carriage rolled languidly out of Balak's only railway station on a sultry February evening, Pobloff, the composer, was not sorry.

"I wish it were Persia instead of Ramboul," he reflected. Luga, his wife, he had left weeping at the station; but since the day she disappeared with his orchestra for twenty-four hours, Pobloff's

affection had gradually cooled; he was leaving the capital without a pang on a month's leave of absence--a delicate courtesy of the king's extended to a brother ruler, though a semi-barbarous one, the khedive of Ramboul.

Pobloff was not sad nor was he jubilantly glad. The journey was an easy one; a night and day and the next night would see him, God willing,--he crossed himself,--in the semi-tropical city of Nirgiz. From Balak to Nirgiz, from southeastern Europe to Asia Minor!

The heir-apparent was said to be a music-loving lad, very much under the cunning thumb of his grim old aunt, who, rumour averred, wore a black beard, and was the scourge of her little kingdom. All that might be changed when the prince would reach his majority; his failing health and morbid melancholy had frightened the grand vizier, and the king of Balakia had been petitioned to send Pobloff, the composer, designer of inimitable musical masques, Pobloff, the irresistible interpreter of Chopin, to the aid of the ailing youth.

So this middle-aged David left his nest to go harp for a Saul yet in his adolescence. What his duties were to be Pobloff had not the slightest idea. He had received no special instructions; a member of the royal household bore him the official mandate and a purse fat enough to soothe his wife's feelings. After appointing his first violin conductor of the Balakian Orchestra during his absence, the fussy, stout, good-natured Russian (he was born at Kiew, 1865, the biographical dictionaries say) secured a sleeping compartment on the Ramboul express, from the windows of which he contemplated with some satisfaction the flat land that gradually faded in the mists of night as the train tore its way noisily over a rude road-bed.

II

Pobloff slept. He usually snored; but this evening he was too fatigued. He heard not the sudden stoppages at lonely way stations where hoarse voices and a lantern represented the life of the place; he did not heed the engine as it thirstily sucked water from a tank in the heart of the Karpakians; and he was surprised, pleased, proud, when a hot February sun, shining through his window, awoke him.

It was six o'clock of a fine morning, and the train was toiling up a precipitous grade to the spine of the mountain, where the down-slope would begin and air-brakes rule. Pobloff looked about him. He scratched his long nose, a characteristic gesture, and began wondering when coffee would be ready. He pressed the bell. The guard entered, a miserable bandit who bravely wore his peaked hat with green plumes à la Tyrol. He spoke four tongues and many dialects; Pobloff calculated his monthly salary at forty roubles.

"No, Excellency, the coffee will be hot and refreshing at Kerb, where we arrive about seven." He cleared his throat, put out his hand, bowed low, and disappeared. The composer grumbled. Kerb!--not until that wretched eyrie in the clouds! And such coffee! No matter. Pobloff never felt in robuster health; his irritable nerves were calmed by a sound night's sleep. The air was fresher than down in the malarial valley, where stood the shining towers of Balak; he could see them pinked by the morning sun and low on the horizon. All together he was glad....

Hello, this must be Kerb! A moment later Pobloff bellowed for the guard; he had shattered the electric annunciator by his violence. Then, not waiting to be served, he ran into the vestibule, and soon was on the station platform, inhaling huge drafts of air into his big chest. Ah! It was glorious up there. What surprised him was the number of human beings clambering over the steps, running and gabbling like a lot of animals let loose from their cages. The engineer beside his quivering machine enjoyed his morning coffee. And there were many turbaned pagans and some veiled women mixed with the crowd.

The sparkling of bright colours and bizarre costumes did not disturb Pobloff, who had lived too long on anonymous borders, where Jew, Christian, Turk, Slav, African, and outlandish folk generally melted into a civilization which still puzzled ethnologists.

A negro, gorgeously clad, guarding closely a slim female, draped from head to foot in virginal white, attracted the musician. The man's face was monstrous in its suggestion of evil, and furthermore shocking, because his nose was a gaping hole. Evidently a scimiter had performed this surgical operation, Pobloff mused.

The giant's eyes offended him, they so stared, and threateningly.

Pobloff was not a coward. After his adventure in Balak, he feared neither man nor devil, and he insolently returned the black fellow's gaze. They stood about a buffet and drank coffee. The young woman--her outlines were girlish--did not touch anything; she turned her face in Pobloff's direction, so he fancied, and spoke at intervals to her attendant.

"I must be a queer-looking bird to this Turk and her keeper--probably some Georgian going to a rich Mussulman's harem in company with his eunuch," Pobloff repeated to himself.

A gong was banged. Before its strident vibrations had ceased troubling the thin morning air, the train began to move slowly out of Kerb. Pobloff again was glad.

He remained on the rear platform of his car as long as the white station, beginning to blister under a tropical sun, was in sight. Then he sought his compartment. His amazement and rage were great when he

found the two window seats occupied by the negro and the mysterious creature. Pobloff's bag was tumbled in a corner, his overcoat, hat, and umbrella tossed to the other end of the room. The big black man bared his teeth smilingly, the shrouded girl shrank back as if in fear.

"Well, I'll be--!" began the composer. Then he leaned over and pushed the button, the veins in his forehead like whipcords, his throat parched with wrath. But to no avail--the bell was broken. Pobloff's first impulse was to take the smiling Ethiopian by the neck and pitch him out. There were several reasons why he did not: the giant looked dangerous; he plainly carried a brace of pistols, and at least one dagger, the jewelled handle of which flashed over his glaring sash of many tints. And then the lady--Pobloff was very gallant, too gallant, his wife said. The bell would not ring! What was he to do? He soon made up his mind, supple Slav that he was. With a muttered apology he sank back and closed his eyes in polite despair.

His consternation was overwhelming when a voice addressed him in Russian, a contralto voice of some indefinable timbre, the voice of a female, yet not without epicene intonations. His eyes immediately opened. From her gauze veiling the young woman spoke:--

"We are sorry to derange you. The guard made a mistake. Pardon!" The tone was slightly condescending, as if the goddess behind the cloud had deigned to notice a mere mortal. Her attendant was smiling, and to Pobloff his grin resembled a newly sliced watermelon. But her voice filled him with ecstasy. His ear, as sensitive as the eye of a Claude Monet, noted every infinitesimal variation in tone-colour, and each shade was a symbol for the fantastic imagination of this poetic composer. The girlish voice affected him strangely. It pierced his soul like a poniard. It made his spine chilly. It evoked visions of white women languorously moving in processional attitudes beneath the chaste rays of an implacable moon. The voice modulated into crisp morning inflections:--

"You are going far, Excellency?" She knew him! And the slave who grinned and grinned and never spoke--what was _he_? She seemed to follow Pobloff's thought.

"Hamet is dumb. His tongue was cut at the same time he lost his nose. It all happened at the siege of Yerkutz."

Pobloff at last found words.

"Poor fellow!" he said sympathetically, and then forgot all about the mutilated one. "You are welcome to this compartment," he assured her in his oiliest manner. "What surprises me is that I did not see your Serene Highness when we left Balak." She started at the title that he bestowed upon her, and he inwardly chuckled. Clever dog, Pobloff, clever dog! Her eyes were brilliant despite obstructing veils.

"I was en route to Balak yesterday, but my servant became ill and I stopped over night at Kerb." Pobloff was entranced. She was undoubtedly a young dame of noble birth and her freedom, the freedom of a European woman, delighted him. It also puzzled.

"How is it--?" he asked.

But they had begun that fearful descent, at once the despair and delight of engineers. The mountain fell away rapidly as the long, clumsy train raced down its flank at a breakneck pace. Pobloff shivered and clutched the arms of his seat. He saw nothing but deep blue sky and the tall top of an occasional tree. The racket was terrific, the heat depressing. She sat in her corner, apparently sleeping, while the giant smiled, always smiled, never removing his ugly eyes from the perspiring countenance of Pobloff.

As they neared earth's level, midday was over. Pobloff hungered. Before he could go in search of the ever absent guard, the woman suddenly sat up, clapped her hands, and said something; but whether it was Turkish, Roumanian, or Greek, he couldn't distinguish. A hamper was hauled from under the seat by the servant, and to his joy Pobloff saw white rolls, grapes, wine, figs, and cheese. He bowed and began eating. The others looked at him and for a moment he could have sworn he heard faint laughter.

"I am so hungry," he said apologetically. "And you, Serenity, won't you join me?" He offered her fruit. It was declined with a short nod. He was dying to smoke, and, behold! priceless Turkish tobacco was thrust into his willing hand. He rolled a stout cigarette, lighted it. Then a sigh reached his ears. "The lady smokes," he thought, and slyly chuckled.

A sound of something tearing was heard, and a pair of beautiful hands reached for the tobacco. In a few moments the slender fingers were pressing a cigarette; the slave lighted a wax fusee; the lady took it, put the cigarette in a rent of her veil, and a second volume of odorous vapour arose. Pobloff leaned back, stupefied. A Mohammedan woman smoking in a Trans-Caucasian railway carriage before a Frank! Stupendous! He felt unaccountably gay.

"This is joyful," he said aloud. She smoked fervently. "Western manners are certainly invading the East," he continued, hoping to hear again that voice of marvellous resonance. She smoked. "Why, even Turkish women have been known to study music in Paris."

"I am not a Turk," she said in her deepest chest tones.

"Pardon! A Russian, perhaps? Your accent is perfect. I am a Russian." She did not reply.

The day declined, and there was no more conversation. As the train devoured leagues of swampy territory, villages were passed. The journey's end was nearing. Soon meadows were seen surrounding magnificent villas. A wide, shallow river was crossed, the Oxal; Pobloff knew by his pocket map that Nirgiz was nigh. And for the first time in twenty-four hours he sorrowed. Despite his broad invitations and unmistakable hints, he could not trap his travelling companion into an avowal of her identity, of her destination. Nothing could be coaxed from the giant, and it was with a sinking heart--Pobloff was very sentimental--that he saw the lights of Nirgiz; a few minutes later the train entered the Oriental station. In the heat, the clamour of half a thousand voices, yelling unknown jargons, his resolution to keep his companions in view went for naught. Beset by jabbering porters, he did not have an opportunity to say farewell to the veiled lady; with her escort she had disappeared when the car stopped--and without a word of thanks! Pobloff was wretched.

III

It was past nine o'clock as he roamed the vast garden surrounding the Palace of a Thousand Sounds--thus named because of the tiny bells tinkling about its marble dome. He had eaten an unsatisfying meal in a small antechamber, waited upon by a stupid servant. And worse still, the food was ill cooked. On presenting his credentials, earlier in the evening, the grand vizier, a sneaky-appearing man, had welcomed him coldly, telling him that her Serene Highness was too exhausted to receive so late in the day; she had granted too many audiences that afternoon.

"And the prince?" he queried. The prince was away hunting by moonlight, and could not be seen for at least a day. In the interim, Pobloff was told to make himself at home, as became such a distinguished composer and artistic plenipotentiary of Balakia's king. Then he was bowed out of the chamber, down the low malachite staircase, into his supper room. It was all very disturbing to a man of Pobloff's equable disposition.

He thought of Luga, his little wife, his dove; but not long. She did not appeal to his heart of hearts; she was a coquette. Pobloff sighed. He was midway in his mortal life, a dangerous period for susceptible manhood. He lifted moist eyes to the stars; the night was delicious. He rested upon a cushioned couch of stone. About him the moonlight painted the trees, until they seemed like liquefied ermine; the palace arose in pyramidal surges of marble to the sky, meeting the moonbeams as if in friendly defiance, and casting them back to heaven with triumphant reflections. And the stillness, profound as the tomb, was punctuated by glancing fireflies. Pobloff hummed melodiously.

"A night to make music," whispered a deep, sweet voice. Before he could rise, his heart bounding as if stung to its centre, a woman, swathed in

white, sat beside him, touched him, put such a pressure upon his shoulder that his blood began to stir. It was she. He stumbled in his speech. She laughed, and he ground his teeth, for this alone saved him from foolishness, from mad behaviour.

"Maestro--you could make music this lovely night?" Pobloff started.

"In God's name, who are you, and what are you doing here? Where did you go this evening? I missed you. Ah! unhappy man that I am, you will drive me crazy!"

She did not smile now, but pressed close to him.

"I am a prisoner--like yourself," she replied simply.

"A prisoner! How a prisoner? I am not a prisoner, but an envoy from my king to the sick princeling."

She sighed.

"The poor, mad prince," she said, "he is in need of your medicine, sadly. He sent for me a year ago, and I am now his prisoner for life."

"But I saw you on the train, a day's journey hence," interrupted the musician.

"Yes, I had escaped, and was being taken back by black Hamet when we met."

Pobloff whistled. So the mystery was disclosed. A little white slave from the seraglio of this embryo tyrant had flown the cage! No wonder she was watched, little surprise that she did not care to eat. He straightened himself, the hair on his round head like porcupine quills.

"My dear young lady," he exclaimed in accents paternal, "leave all to me. If you do not wish to stay in this place, you may rely on me. When I see this same young man,--he must be a nice sprig of royalty!--I propose to tell him what I think of him." Pobloff threw out his chest and snorted with pride. Again he fancied that he heard suppressed laughter. He darted glances in every direction, but the fall of distant waters smote upon his ears like the crepuscular music of Chopin. His companion shook with ill-suppressed emotion. It was some time before she could speak.

"Pobloff," she begged, in her dangerous contralto, a contralto like the medium register of a clarinet, "Pobloff, let me adjure you to be careful. Your coming here has caused political disturbances. The aunt of the prince hates music as much as he adores it. She is no party to your invitation. So be on your guard. Even now there may be spies in the shrubbery." She put her hand on his arm. It was too much. In an instant,

despite her feeble struggle, the ardent musician grasped the creature that had tantalized him since morning, and kissed her a dozen times. His head whirled. Pobloff! Pobloff! a voice cried in his brain--and only yesterday you left your Luga, your pretty pigeon, your wife!

The girl was dragged away from him. In the moonshine he saw the grinning Hamet, suspiciously observing him. The runaway stood up and pressed Pobloff's hand desperately, uttering the cry of her forlorn heart:--

"Don't play in the great hall; don't play in that accursed place. You will be asked, but refuse. Make any excuse, but do not set foot on its ebon floors."

He was so confused by the strangeness of this adventure, so confused by the admonition of the unknown when he saw her white draperies disappear, that his jaw fell and his courage wavered. A moment later two oddly caparisoned soldiers, bearing lights, approached, and in the name of her Highness invited him make midnight music in the Palace of a Thousand Sounds.

IV

Seated before a Steinway grand pianoforte, an instrument that found its way to this far-away province through the caprice of some artistic potentate, Pobloff nervously preluded. Notwithstanding the warning of the girl, he had allowed himself to be convoyed to the great Hall of Ebony, and there, quite alone, he sat waiting for some cue to begin. None came. He glanced curiously about him. For all the signs of humanity he might as well have been on the heights of Kerb, out among its thorny groves, or in its immemorial forests. He preluded as he gazed around. He could see, by the dim light of two flambeaux set in gold sconces, column after column of blackness receding into inky depths of darkness. A fringe of light encircled his instrument, and beside him was a gallery, so vast that it became a gulf of the infinite at a hundred paces. Now, Pobloff was a brave man. He believed that once upon a time he had peered into strange crevices of space; what novelty could existence hold for him after that shuddering experience? Again he looked into the tenebrous recesses of the hall. He saw nothing, heard nothing.

His fingers went their own way over the keyboard. Finally, following some latent impulse, they began to shape the opening measures of Chopin's Second Ballade, the one of the enigmatic tonalities, sometimes called *_The Lake of the Mermaids_*. It began with the chanting, childish refrain, a Lithuanian fairy-tale of old, and as its naïve, drowsy, lulling measures--the voices of wicked, wooing sirens--sang and sank in recurrent rhythms, Pobloff heard--this time he was sure--the regular reverberation of distant footsteps. It was as if the monotonous beat of the music were duplicated in some sounding mirror, some mirror that magnified hideously, hideously mimicked the melody. Yet these footfalls

murmured as a sea-shell. Every phrase stood out before the pianist, exquisitely clear; his brain had only once before harboured such an exalted mood. There was the expectation of great things coming to pass; dim rumours of an apocalyptic future, when the glory that never was on sea or land should rend the veil of the visible and make clear all that obscures and darkens. The transfiguration which informs the soul of one taken down in epileptic seizure possessed him. Every cranny of his being was flooded with overmastering light--and the faint sound of footsteps marking sinister time to his music, drew closer, closer.

Shaking off an insane desire to join his voice in the immortal choring of the Cherubim, Pobloff dashed into the passionate storm-scream of the music, and like a pack of phantom bloodhounds the footsteps pressed him in the race. He played as run men from starving wolves in Siberian wastes. To stop would mean--God! what would it mean? These were no mortal steps that crowded upon his sonorous trail. His fingers flew over the keys as he finished the scurrying tempests of tone. Again the first swaying refrain, and Pobloff heard the invisible multitude of feet pause in the night, as if waiting the moment when the Ballade would cease. He quivered; the surprises and terrors were telling upon his well-seasoned nerves.

Still he sped on, fearing the tremendous outburst at the close, where Chopin throws overboard his soul, and with blood-red sails signals the hellish _Willis_, the Lamias of the lake, to his side. Ah, if Pobloff could but thus portion his soul as hostage to the infernal host that now hemmed him in on all sides! Riding over the black and white rocks of his keyboard, he felt as if in the clutches of an unknown force. He discerned death in the distance--death and the unknown horror--and was powerless to resist. Still the galloping of unseen feet, horrible, naked flesh, that clattered and scraped the earth; the panting, hoarse and subdued, of a mighty pack, whose thirst for destruction, for revenge, was unslaked. And always the same trampling of human feet! Were they human? Did not resilient bones tell the tale of brutes viler than men? The glimmering lights seemed cowed, as they sobbed in vacuity and slowly expired.

Pobloff no longer asked himself what it meant; he was become a maniac, pursued by deathless devils. He could have flown to the end of the universe in this Ballade; but, at last, his heart cracking, head bursting, face livid, overtaken by the Footsteps of the Missing, he smashed both fists upon the keys and fell forward despairingly....

* * * * *

... The gigantic, noseless negro, the grand vizier himself, sternly regarded the prince, who stood, torch in hand, near the shattered pianoforte. The dumb spoke:--

"Let us hope, Exalted Highness, that your masquerades and mystifications

are over forever. To-day's prankish sport may put us to trouble for a satisfactory explanation." He waved his hand vaguely in the direction of the prostrate composer. "And hasheesh sometimes maddens for a lifetime!" He lightly touched the drugged Pobloff with his enormous foot.

The youthful runaway ashamedly lowered his head--in reality he adored music with all the fulness of his cruel, faunlike nature.



ON THE GRASSHOPPER AND CRICKET. By John Keats.
The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Land of Song, Book II*, by Various

The poetry of earth is never dead:
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;
That is the grasshopper's--he takes the lead
In summer luxury,--he has never done
With his delights, for when tired out with fun,
He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.
The poetry of earth is ceasing never:
On a lone winter evening, when the frost
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills
The cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,
The grasshopper's among some grassy hills.

